**This issue:** An interview with **VALENTINO**, a complete heroine history of **DAZZLER**, as well as an article on some *intentionally* funny super-heroes!

No. 92 • April 1 • $2.25 ($3.15 in Canada)

# AMAZING HEROES

# VALENTINO
# IS ON THE MOVE...

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## To

Myth ADVENTURES!

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**OUR COVER:**

The MythAdventures crew reels back in surprise as Steeve's incantation calls forth the normalman cast of characters. Illustration by and © 1986 Valentino, except for the Myth characters, which are © Robert Asprin. Separations by Dave Nelson.

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## EDITORIAL by David Smay

Hello comic fans and welcome to the *Amazing Heroes* manifesto. *AH* exists in a nether space roughly bounded by fandom's unslakable thirst for trivial trickles of information and the publishers' need to dump large wads of publicity on an unsuspecting populace. But we at Fantagraphics reserve the right to refuse service on the grounds that we're contrary, ornery and our intent is more subversive. We're not exactly a fanzine and we're certainly not a house organ, and that's the way we like it. Now don't get all riled up—I'm not trying to start a riot here. After all, we're fans and we're in the publishing biz, so we have a vested interest in both concerns. I'm just saying you're going to have to trust us when we try on some new directions for size. Now, I *could* sit here and promise you all kinds of technically impossible things, like printing a whole issue of *Amazing Heroes* in sensurround. But talk is cheap. If after 7 issues (we should have the new format well in place by then) you are not completely satisfied with the new and improved *Amazing Heroes*—if it doesn't give you fresher breath, whiter teeth and improve your love life—I'll double your bunny back. That's right. I'll print two rabbits for every one you send in. If, however, we tickle your fancy, pique your interest, arouse your ire or split your infinitive, you must promise not to send in any letters of niggling continuity complaints. For a whole month. Instead you must renew your commitment (not to mention your subscription) to writing stimulating letters. Controversial letters. Belle lettres. Letter hacks, this is a call to arms! You are not limited to kudos and complaints. You need not passively wait for a premade controversy like *Crisis* or John Byrne's departure from Marvel. How has the idea of superhero-as-crime-fighter changed in the last 20 years? What has been lost with the shift in emphasis from plot to characterization during that same period? What are the advantages of the serial format in comic books? How has the mini-series changed the industry? Is Marvel's continuity a crutch for creators who are unable to create credible milieu's of their own? Is that what made Simonson's *Thor* or Miller's *Daredevil* stand out? Got it? Get to work.

And what am I going to be doing while you're thinking deep thoughts and typing them up double-spaced? Not much. Just keeping *AH* on schedule, completely revamping the format, putting together the next *Preview Special*, and organizing our special Kirby issue (#100). And this is a good time to announce one of the features slated for the new format (premiering in issue #96 if you need to be reminded). I want to start a reader's poll. This is how it'll work. Each issue we'll run a provocative question as suggested by a member of our studio audience (that's you) like: Who is the sexiest green humanoid in the history of comicdom? Or: What is the funniest exchange of dialogue? Or: Who has the bitchin'est spaceship in the galaxy? The tricky part is that not only must the question be interesting and fun but the answers must also be pithy, insightful, etc. Can you handle it? I think you can, so I'm throwing out the inaugural question of your new feature: A major complaint against super-hero comics is that they tend to revolve around two hyper-muscular guys in leotards pounding the poop out of each other. This is a legitimate gripe because a really good fight scene is hard to do in a comic. It has to account for the powers of the heroes yet maintain a sense of proportion that makes it seem real to us. It can be funny (Badger vs. the demon: Slice and dice!); grim (Bullseye vs. Elektra): epic (Orion vs. Kalibak); whatever. The question is: What is the best fight scene in comics? Send us your top three choices. I will personally tabulate the results and print any answers that are especially hilarious or interesting.


### STAFF

**Meneging Editor:** David Smay
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**Executive Editor:** Kim Thompson
**News Correspondent:** Tom Heintjes
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# Newsflashes

**MARVEL NEWS:** Alpha Flight meets the Avengers in ***Alpha Flight* #39**, shipping June 10. That story continues into ***Avengers* #272** (shipping June 17), and concludes in ***Alpha Flight* #40** (shipping July 8). The story will resolve, for once and for all, the relationship between Sub-Mariner and Marrina. The double-sized last issue of ***Squadron Supreme*** will feature a battle—yes, a battle—between the Squadron and Nighthawk's Redeemers. ***Marvel Age* #41** is an all-STAN LEE issue, featuring the return of the Soapbox, FRED HEMBECK on Lee, and more. In ***Marvel Saga* #9**, the Angel's origin concludes, Spider-Men hes his first rendez-vous with the Fantastic Four, and so does the Hulk. ***X-Men* #208** kicks off a two-part story, with Rachel on the run from the X-Men, the Hellfire Club, and Nimrod. In the course of the next couple of issues, several characters will lose their lives. ***Iron Men* #209** feetures the return of the Living Laser. With its 9th issue, ***Peter Porker, The Spectaculer Spider-Hem*** will be published nine times a yeer, rather than six. In ***Groo the Wenderer* #18**, Groo meets Grooella. Dreadstar and his rebel band go on trial for their crimes against the Instrumentality in ***Dreedstar* #25** (this is the penultimate issue of JIM STARLIN's book to be published by Marvel/Epic, after which it finds a new home at First Comics).

**DC NEWS:** In ***The Legion of Super-Heroes* #25**, Sensor Girl's identity is revealed, just in time for the brank-new Fatal Five to strike. In ***Swamp Thing* #51**, written by ALAN MOORE and drawn by RICK VEITCH and ALFREDO ALCALA, Swamp Thing travels back to Louisiana, but meanwhile Abby has troubles of her own. In ***Booster Gold* #7**, Booster learns a lesson about the abuse of super-powers—as only the Man of Steel can teach such a lesson.

**NEWS FROM EARTH-TWO:** ***Infinity, Inc.*** has acquired a permanent penciller in TODD McFARLANE, who has signed a contract with DC Comics, according to ***Ie***editor/writer ROY THOMAS. McFarlane will be doing every issue up through early 1987—with the exception of an Obsidian origin issue, illustrated by ***Alter Ego*** artist RON HARRIS, and a Solomon Grundy issue, illustrated by MIKE BAIR (e.k.a. Mike Hernandez).

Continuity buffs should also note that ***Infinity, Inc.*** #30, which will be released a few weeks after the ***Last Days of the Justice Society*** special, in a "sequel/footnote" to that tale.

**KITCHEN SINK NEWS:** MIKE BARON, RAND HOLMES, JACK JACKSON, SAM KIETH, and newcomer DOUG ERB will be featured in ***Deeth Rettle* #4**, shipping April 23. For #5, STEVE RUDE and PETE POPLASKI collaborate on the cover. Incidentally, this will be the first cover that Rude has done for any comic book other than ***Nexus***. ***Deeth Rettle*** sells for $2.00, and the fifth issue ships June 24.

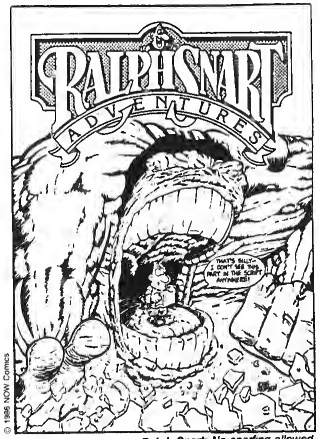
**SIRIUS NEWS:** BART SEARS and RICK BRYANT, artists on New Sirius' ***Hero Alliance***, provide the cover for ***Greylore* #5**, on sale in April. BO HAMPTON continues to provided the interior artwork. ***Tales of the Sun-Runners* #2**, on sale in May, features "The Death of a Sun-Runner" Regular series creators ROGER McKENZIE and GLEN JOHNSON do the honors.

**TWISTED IN 3-D:** In June, Blackthorne will be presenting a 32-page package of 3-D horror with **Twisted Tales 3-D**, featuring reprinted stories from the Pecific Comics title, and a new cover by STEVE HOUSTON. The stories, ell written by BRUCE JONES, include artwork by THOM

# NEWSFLASHES

ENRIQUEZ, BUTCH GUICE, RICHARD CORBEN, BRET BLEVINS, JOHN TOTLEBEN, and JOHN BOLTON.

**RETITLINGS:** Dragon Lady Press' comic strip reprint title, ***Best of the Tribune Company***, has been retitled ***Thrilling Adventure Strips*** with the fifth issue. That issue, shipping in early June, reprints two 1940 *Brenda Starr* stories by DALE MESSICK. The price is $2.95.




***Ralph Snart**: No snarfing allowed.*

Meanwhile, NOW Comics' ***Ralph Snart*** has been changed to ***Relph Snert***, upon request from DENIS KITCHEN, whose underground ***Snerf*** is still available in many stores. NOW's title is still scheduled for May 31 release, at the low cover price of $1.00.

**CRITTERS NEWS:** New faces in Fantagraphics Books' ***Critters*** will include TOM (***Spaced***) STAZER, who premieres in **#4** with a funny-animal detective strip, and MARK ARMSTRONG, who will be reviving his "Jack Bunny" character starting in **#6**. The first "Gnuff" serial concludes in **#5** (where it's cover-featured), but the dragons will return in **#8**. And STEVEN GALLACCI's "Birthright" closes in the sixth issue.

***Critters*** will also see a spin-off of sorts with the ***Usagi Yojimbo Summer Special***. In addition to reprinting three out-of print UJ stories from ***Albedo***, the special includes a new story and a new wraparound cover by creator STAN SAKAI, as well as an introduction by MARK EVANIER and a page by SERGIO ARAGONES. A 48-page book selling for $2.75, ***UJSS*** will ship in July.

*A panel from Tom Stazer's story in **Critters #4**.*

**COMING FROM STEELDRAGON:** After a slow first half of 1986, SteelDragon Press returns in force in June with two titles: ***Captain Confederacy*** #2 and REED WALLER's adults-only ***Omahe, the Cat Dancer*** #2.



The Adventures of Michael Moorcock's legendary hero continue.

By Roy Thomas, Michael T. Gilbert, George Freeman, and P. Craig Russell

A five-Part Deluxe Series COMING IN JUNE FROM FIRST COMICS COUNT ON US.

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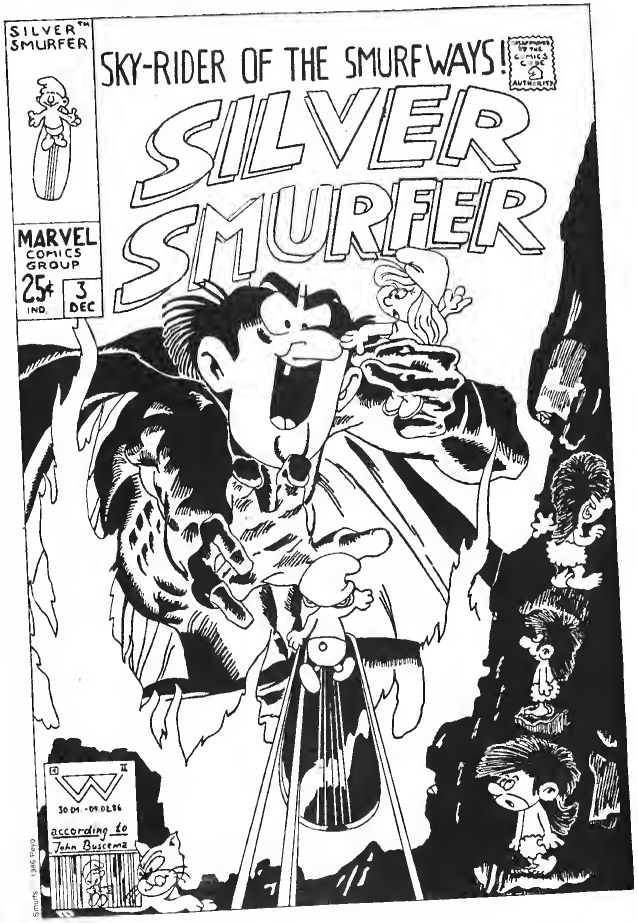
# SILLY COVER




*by Bernd Weckwert*



# Coming DISTRACTIONS

## APRIL 1-15

### AARDVARK-VANAHEIM

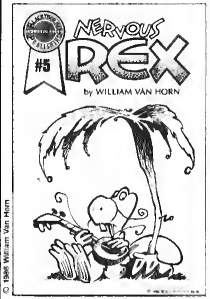
☐ **CEREBUS THE AARDVARK #85**
Story/Art/Cover ..... **Dave Sim**
Backgrounds ..... **Gerhard**
*[$1.70 direct-sales black-and-white comic; ships 4/15]*

### AIRCEL PUBLISHING

☐ **ELFLORD #2**
The fantasy adventure story continues.
Story ..... **Bruce & Barry Blair**
Art ..... **McEown & Blair**
*[$1.50 direct-sales black-and-white comic; ships 4/7]*

### BLACKTHORNE

☐ **JERRY IGER'S GOLDEN FEATURES #2**
Featuring Wonder Boy, a Bronx teen hero who acquired his powers by being exposed to chemicals in a lab fire.
Story ..... **Jerry Iger**
Art ..... **Matt Baker**
*[$2.00 direct-sales black-and-white color comic; ships in April]*



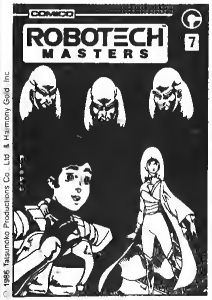

© 1986 William Van Horn

☐ **NERVOUS REX #5**
Rex meets a spanish fly and faces the problem of the tapioca pies.
All by ..... **William Van Horn**
*[$2.00 direct-sales black-and-white color comic; ships in April]*

☐ **SALIMBA IN 3-D #2**
Introducing beautiful princess Zara, the Dwelves, and many other fantastic characters.
Story ..... **Steve Perry**
Art ..... **Chadwick & Patterson**
*[$2.50 3-D direct-sales comic; ships in April]*

☐ **TALES OF THE JACKALOPE #2**
Will Junior survive the terrifying experience of the Stream Shark?
All by ..... **R.L. Crabb**
*[$2.00 direct-sales black-and-white color comic; ships in April]*

### COMICO




© 1986 Tatsunoko Productions Co., Ltd. & Harmony Gold, Inc.

☐ **ROBOTECH MASTERS #7**
"The Trap"
Dana Sterling and A.T.A.C. Squadron are ambushed.
Story ..... **Mike Baron**
Art ..... **Vokes & Wilson**
*[$1.50 direct-sales color comic; ships 4/4]*

### DC COMICS

☐ **AMETHYST #16**
Amethyst retreats from a Chaos-ridden Gemworld to find Earth's not any better.
Story ..... **Giffen & Fleming**
Art/Cover ..... **Colon & Kessel**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/15; newsstand o/s 5/8]*

☐ **ANGEL LOVE #1**
The whimsical, off-beat adventures of a struggling young woman artist in the big city.
All by ..... **Barbara Slate**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **BATMAN #398**
Conclusion of the Two-Face saga.
Story ..... **Doug Moench**
Art/Cover ..... **Tom Mandrake**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/15; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **BLUE BEETLE #3**
The Blue Beetle battles the malevolent Madmen.
Story ..... **Len Wein**
Art/Cover ..... **Cullins & Patterson**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/15; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **DC COMICS PRESENTS #96**
When Superman mysteriously disappears from metropolis, Blue Devil declares himself "in charge" of the city!
Story ..... **Gold & Mishkin**
Art ..... **Joe Staton**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **ELECTRIC WARRIOR #4**
The Primmies are attacked by a squad of Electric Warriors, while 9-03 falls for Kinsolving.
Story ..... **Doug Moench**
Art/Cover ..... **Jim Baikie**
*[$1.50 direct-sales color comic; ships 4/15]*

☐ **ELVIRA'S HOUSE OF MYSTERY #6**
Elvira learns one of Cain's deepest, darkest secrets. He is mortified. She is revulsed.
Story ..... **Joey Cavalieri**
Art ..... **Stan Woch**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/15; newsstand o/s 5/8]*

☐ **FURY OF FIRESTORM #50**
Wedding bells toll for Ed Raymond, if Firestorm can prevent the groom's past from creating disaster.
Story ..... **Gerry Conway**
Art ..... **Kayanan & Machlan**
Cover ..... **Cowan & Janson**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **HEX #12**
Hex and Batman battle the giant Terminators unleashed against New York by the Combine.
Story ..... **Michael Fleisher**
Art/Cover ..... **Texeira & Garzon**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #253**
Despero rules Gotham City, unless the JLA can stop him.
Story ..... **Gerry Conway**
Art/Cover ..... **McDonnell & Wray**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

1988 DC Comics, Inc.

☐ **LEGEND OF WONDER WOMAN #4**
Conclusion of this untold tale of the Amazing Amazon.
Story **Bueiek & Robbine**
Art/Cover **Trine Robbine**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic ships 4/8; news-stand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES #25**
Finally! Sensor Girl's identity revealed as the brand new Fatal Five attacks!
Story **Paul Levitz**
Art/Cover **LaRocque & DeCerio**
*[$1.50 direct-sales color comic, ships 4/15]*

☐ **'MAZING MAN #8**
Maze is cat-sitting and Kitty gets trapped in the wall! Plus KP's grandma moves in!
Story **DeStefano & Rozakie**
Art/Cover **DeStefano & Smith**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic, ships 4/15, news-stand o/s 5/8]*

☐ **THE OUTSIDERS #10**
Introducing DC's first communist superteam: The People's Heroes! Plus a Geo-Force back-up by **Jerry Ordway**
Story **Mike W. Barr**
Art/Cover **Jim Apero**
*[$1.50 direct-sales color comic, ships 4/8]*

☐ **ROOTS OF THE SWAMP THING #2**
More classics from Wein & Wrightson.
Story **Len Wein**
Art/Cover **Berni Wrightson**
*[$2.00 48-page direct-sales color comic, ships 4/8]*

☐ **SECRET ORIGINS #5**
Before there was Batman, there was the Crimson Avenger. DC's *first* masked hero lives again!
Story **R. & D. Thomee**
Art/Cover **Gene Colan**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic, ships 4/15, news-stand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **SON OF AMBUSH BUG #2**
Ambush Bug goes to Hell.
Story **Giffen & Fleming**
Art/Cover **Giffen & Oksner**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic, ships 4/8, news-stand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **STAR TREK #29**
On an alien world, rookie crewmen face deadly creatures and their own fears.
Story **Tony Isabella**
Art **Sutton/Villagran**
Cover **Brozowski & Villagran**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic, ships 4/15, news-stand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **SUPERMAN #422**
The dreadful secret of the werewolf murderer.
Story **Cary Betee**
Art **Swan & Hunt**
Cover **Brian Bolland**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic, ships 4/15, news-stand o/s 5/8]*

☐ **TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS #68**
It's super-hero Titans and mythological Titans against the Giants.
(Reprinted from *Teen Titans* #6.)
Story **Merv Wolfman**
Art **Gerrie Lopez & Tenghei**
Cover **Barry Windsor-Smith**
*[75¢ newsstand color comic, ships 4/15, news-stand o/s 5/8]*

☐ **VIGILANTE #32**
Vigilante is caught between the mob and the police.
Story **Paul Kupperberg**
Art **Patton & Meggyar**
*[$1.50 direct-sales color comic, ships 4/8]*

## EAGLE COMICS

© 1988 IPC Magazines Ltd

☐ **JUDGE DREDD #33**
"The League of Fatties," "Gunge," "Rabid," and "Blobs."
Story **Wagner & Grant**
Art **Ron Smith**
Cover **Brett Ewine**
*[$1.25 direct-sales Mando color comic, ships 3/25]*

☐ **JUDGE DREDD: THE EARLY CASES #6**
"Elvis" and "22nd Futsie."
Story **Wagner & Grant**
Cover **Ian Gibson**
*[$1.25 direct-sales Mando color comic, ships 3/25]*

☐ **2000 A.D. MONTHLY #4**
"Judge Anderson Vs. Judge Death"
Story **Wagner & Grant**
Art **Ewins & Robinson**
"Skizz"
Story **Alan Moore**
Art **Jim Baikie**
"Abelard Snazz—The Two-Story Brain"
Story **Alan Moore**
Art **Steve Dillon**
"Skizz"
Story **Alan Moore**
Art **Dave Gibbons**
Cover **Brett Ewine**
*[$1.25 direct-sales Mando color comic, ships 3/25]*

## ECLIPSE COMICS

☐ **ADOLESCENT RADIOACTIVE BLACK BELT HAMSTERS#2**
More tiny flying, furry feet of death!
Story **Don Chin**
Art **Paranoevich**
*[$1.50 direct-sales black & white comic, ships 4/1]*

☐ **ALIEN ENCOUNTERS#6**
**Bruce Jones** is back. Features an adaptation of "Eight O'Clock in the Morning" under the title "Nada." Also "Freefall" by **Len Wein** and **Chuck** (*Miracleman*) **Beckum**. And more.
Cover **Peter Ledger**
*[$1.75 direct-sales color comic, ships 4/1]*

☐ **THE MASKED MAN#9**
Final issue. Dick and Maggie get married!
Story/Art **B.C. Boyer**
*[$1.75 direct-sales color comic, ships 4/8]*

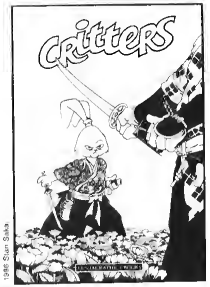
1988 Timothy Truman

☐ **SCOUT #6**
"House Burning Down"
Scout's wounded & hunted and he turns to the woman he once loved for help.
All by **Timothy Truman**
Plus "Fashion in Action" by **John K. Snyder III**
*[$1.75 direct-sales color comic, ships 4/1]*

☐ **SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT #6**

More classic stories from **Alex Toth, Jerry Grandenetti**, and others.
*[$1.75 direct-sales color comic, ships 4/9]*

## FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS




© 1986 Sam Sakai

☐ **CRITTERS #3**
"Birthright, Chapter Three"
Prince Alfon, back on his home planet, encounters problems.
Story/Art ..... **Steve Gallacci**
"Horse Thief"
Usagi Yojimbo is accused of an unsavory pastime.
Story/Art/Cover ..... **Stan Sakai**
"Gruff: Unhappy Returns"
Gnelliel's birthday is ruined.
Story/Art ..... **Freddy Milton**
*[$2.00 black-and-white direct-sales comic, ships 4/7]*

© 1986 Gary Fields

☐ **THREAT #3**
Bob Mercenary Family Ties Part Three
Bob gets even deeper into trouble.
Story ..... **Dave Harrison**
Art ..... **Jay Geldhof**
"Zone"
Story/Art ..... **M. Kraiger**
"Enigma Funnies"
Story/Art/Cover ..... **Gary Fields**
"The Holo Bros."
Story/Art ..... **Jim Rohn**
*[$2.25 direct-sales black-and-white magazine, ships 4/14]*

## FICTIONEER

☐ **THE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS GRAPHIC NOVEL**
Reprinting the first two, hard-to-find, issues of ***Southern Knights***.
Art/Cover ..... **Jackson Guice**
*[$4.95 direct-sales black-and-white graphic novel, ships in April]*

## FIRST COMICS

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☐ **THE BADGER #14**
The Badger avenges a snake's death in "Snake Bile Cognac."
Story ..... **Mike Baron**
Art ..... **Reinhold & Bryant**
Cover ..... **Bill Reinhold**
Plus a "Zoomtown" chapter.
Story ..... **Mike Baron**
Art ..... **Wagner & Martin**
*[$1.75 direct-sales color comic, ships 3/26]*

☐ **GRIMJACK #25**
The concluding chapter to "Demon Blood."
Story ..... **John Ostrander**
Art ..... **Sutton & Gulnen**
Plus a Munden's Bar story.
Story ..... **John Ostrander**
Art ..... **Close & Bender**
*[$1.25 direct-sales Mando color comic, ships 4/4]*

☐ **NEXUS #23**
Bumped from last issue, this is the "Bowl-Shaped" world story sequel illustrated by **Keith Giffen**.
Story ..... **Mike Baron**
Art ..... **Giffen & Bryant**
*[$1.75 direct-sales color comic, ships 3/26]*

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☐ **WHISPER #2**
Alex uncovers the secret of Squadron 49.
Story ..... **Steven Grant**
Art ..... **Dell Barrae**
*[$1.25 direct sales color comic, ships 4/4]*

## INDEPENDENT

☐ **THE OFFICIAL CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS INDEX #1**
Everything about the *Crisis* you ever wanted to know–
Compiled by ..... **Murray Werd**
And also ..... **Merk Weld**
Cover ..... **George Perez**
*[$1.75 direct-sales color comic, ships 4/1]*

## KITCHEN SINK

☐ **THE SPIRIT #18**
Reprinting four more classic Spirit stories.
All by ..... **Will Eisner**
*[$1.95 direct-sales black-and-white comic, ships in April]*

## MARVEL COMICS

☐ **ALPHA FLIGHT #37**
Snowbird is still in labor (ouch), guest starring the Avengers, Dr. Strange and Sub-Mariner.
Story ..... **Bill Mantlo**
Art ..... **Ross & Teleoc**
Cover ..... **David Ross**
*[75¢ color comic, ships 4/8, newsstand o/s 5/1]*

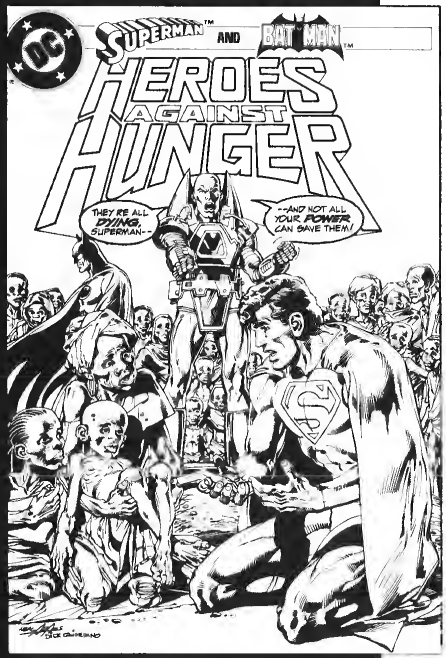
☐ **AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #279**
Spiderman is missing, part two. Guest stars Silver Sable.
Story ..... **Tom DeFalco**
Art ..... **Rick Leonardi**
*[75¢ color comic, ships 4/8, newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **CAPTAIN AMERICA #320**
Final chapter of the Scourge story.
Story ..... **Mark Gruenwald**




**Bob Geldolf proved an individual's efforts to end hunger in Ethiopia could make a difference.**

**We agree.**




Front cover: Neal Adams and Dick Giordano
Back cover: Bill Sienkiewicz

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**The following individuals donated their talent to create "A Song of Pain and Sorrow".**

Jim Starling
George Pérez
Kim DeMulder
Cary Bates
Paris Cullins
Tony DeZuniga
Elliot S. Maggin
Denys Cowan
Val Mayerik
Paul Levitz
Jan Duursema
Alfredo Alcala
Mike Barr
Keith Giffen
Joe Staton
Mike Fleisher
Ross Andru
Klaus Janson
Bob Rozakis
Jose Luis Garcia Lopez
Jerry Ordway
Roy Thomas
Carmine Infantino
Murphy Anderson
J. M. DeMatteis
Marshall Rogers
Karl Kesel
Robert Bloch
Berni Wrightson
Mike Kaluta
Robert Loren Fleming
Joe Brozowski
Gray Morrow
Marv Wolfman
Sal Amendola
Jim Aparo
Tony Isabella
Curt Swan
John Byrne
Gerry Conway
Barry Windsor Smith
Jeff Jones
Barbara Randall
Ernie Colon
Terry Austin
Andrew Helfer
Walter Simonson
Steve Lelaloha
Len Wein
Dave Gibbons
Bruce Patterson
Dan Mishkin
Ed Barreto
Romeo Tanghal
Ed Hannigan
Jack Kirby
Al Milgrom
Mindy Newell
Tony Salmons
Tom Mandrake
Steve Englehart
Dan Jurgens
Bill Wray
Joey Cavalieri
Joe Kubert
Joe Rubinstein
Paul Kupperberg
David Ross
Howard Chaykin
Doug Moench
Jim Sherman

All profits from the sale of this book will be donated to famine relief in Ethiopia.

Art ..... Neary & Janke
*[75¢ color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **DAKOTA NORTH #2**
More high-flying adventures in the world of high-fashion.
Story ..... Martha Thomases
Art ..... Tony Salmons
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/1; newsstand o/s 4/24]*

© 1986 Marvel Comics Group

☐ **DAREDEVIL #233**
The conclusion of the Kingpin conflict.
Story ..... Frank Miller
Art/Cover ..... David Mazzuchelli
*[75¢ color comic; ships 4/1; newsstand o/s 4/24]*

☐ **DOCTOR STRANGE #78**
Guest star Cloak. Doc tries to repair his cloak of levitation and calls in some expert help.
Story ..... Peter Gillis
Art ..... Werner & Emberlin
Cover ..... Chris Werner
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **FANTASTIC FOUR INDEX #9**
Indexing still even yet more issues.
Editor ..... George Olshevsky
*[$1.25 direct sales Mando color comic; ships 4/8]*

☐ **NEW MUTANTS #42**
Sam brings Lila Cheney home to meet his mom.
Story ..... Chris Claremont
Art ..... Guice & Austin
*[75¢ color comic; ships 4/1; newsstand o/s 4/24]*

☐ **THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE #9**
Series now expanded to beyond 12 issues.
Text ..... Sanderson & Gruenwald
Art ..... Various
*[$1.50 white-paper comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **POWER PACK #25**
Double-sized conclusion to Snark Wars which will result in changing of kids' powers.
Story ..... Louise Simonson
Art ..... Bogdanov & Wiacek
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/8]; news stand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #126**
"The Mercenary"
Story ..... Larry Yakata
Art ..... Gary Kwapisz
Cover ..... Beekman
*[$1.50 black-and-white magazine; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **SQUADRON SUPREME #12**
Double-sized final battle between the Squadron and Nighthawk's Redeemers.
Story ..... Mark Gruenwald
Art ..... Ryan & DeLarosa
Cover ..... Ryan & Layton
*[75¢ color comic; ships 4/1; newsstand o/s 4/24]*

☐ **VISION AND THE SCARLET WITCH #11**
Guest stars Spider-Man & Quicksilver.
Story ..... Steve Englehart
Art/Cover ..... Howell & Springer
*[75¢ color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #17**
At the end of this issue Spidey disappears from all of his books for a month.
Story ..... David Michelinie
Art ..... Silvestri & Beker
*[75¢ color comic; ships 4/1; newsstand o/s 4/24]*

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☐ **WEST COAST AVENGERS #11**
Background on Mockingbird and dirty deeds at SHIELD.
Story ..... Steve Englehart
Art/Cover ..... Milgrom & Sinnott
*[75¢ color comic; ships 4/1; newsstand o/s 4/24]*

## MARVEL EPIC COMICS

☐ **GROO THE WANDERER #18**
Groo meets Grooella!
All by ..... Sergio Aragonés
Not to mention ..... Mark Evanier
*[75¢ color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **MOONSHADOW #8**
Moonshadow is rescued from a life of soup kitchens and bag ladies.
Story ..... J.M. DeMatteis
Art ..... Jon Muth
*[$1.75 color comic; ships 4/1]*

## MARVEL STAR COMICS

☐ **HEATHCLIFF #9**
Introducing Catula the Vampire Cat!
Story ..... Michael Gallagher
Art ..... Kremer/Roettcher
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/8; newsstand o/s 5/1]*

☐ **MISTY #5**
Three stories: "Video Wars", "Millie's Memories," and "That's about the size of it."
Story/Art ..... Trina Robbins
*[75¢ color comic; ships 4/1; newsstand o/s 4/24]*

☐ **PETER PORKER #9**
Now shipping nine times a year.
Story ..... Steve Mellor
Art ..... Joe Albelo
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/1; news stand o/s 4/24]*

☐ **THUNDERCATS #5**
Lion-O attempts to rescue the kidnapped ghost of Jaga!
Story ..... David Michelinie
Art ..... Mooney/Breeding
*[75¢ newsstand color comic; ships 4/1; newsstand o/s 4/24]*

## MEGATON

© 1986 Megaton

☐ **MEGATON #4**
*[$1.50 direct-sales black-and-white comic; ships in April]*

## RENEGADE PRESS

☐ **MAXWELL MOUSE FOLLIES #2**
More mouse-size adventures.
All by ..... Joe Sinerdi
*[$1.70 direct-sales black-and-white comic; ships 4/11]*

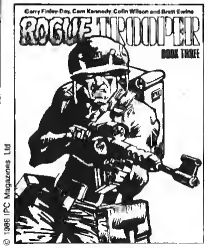
☐ **MS. TREE #28**
The aftermath of Ms. Tree's prison stay.
Story ..... Max Allan Collins
Art/Cover ..... Terry Beatty
*[$1.70 direct-sales two-color comic; ships 4/11]*

© 1986 Joe Sinerdi

☐ **REVOLVER #6**
Featuring the "Fantastic Fables" series.
*[$1.70 direct-sales black-and-white comic; ships 4/11]*

## TITAN BOOKS

☐ **JUDGE DREDD BOOK NINE**
This book (which, oddly enough, is Volume 20 in the Dredd series) features Dredd work by **Steve Dillon**, including the 49-page "Cry of the Werewolf" as well as "The Wreckers."
Story ..... Wagner & Grant
*[$6.95 direct-sales black-and-white square-bound volume; ships in April]*



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☐ **ROGUE TROOPER BOOK THREE**
The artists on this volume include Cam Kennedy, Colin Wilson, and Brett Ewins.
Story ..... Gerry Finley-Day
*[$6.95 direct-sales black-and-white square-bound volume; ships in April]*


# The Comics Journal SPECIAL ADVENTURE ISSUE!

© 1986 Milton Caniff

**The April issue of THE COMICS JOURNAL takes the high road for action with an excitement-filled program!**

- **A very long interview with MILTON CANIFF, conducted and annotated by ARN SABA!**
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# VALENTINO LOOKS AT normalman

## By R.A. Jones

Having recently undertaken an issue-by-issue examinaton of the *Crisis* on *Infinite Earths* series, I was determined to forego taking on another such mammoth assignment any time soon. My luck being what it is, I was not suprised when, the day I finished the *Crisis* piece, I was asked to perform similar chores in regard to yet another series. My brain being what it is, it was no more surprising when I found myself accepting.

The series in question is *normalman*, and while it may lack the grand significance of *Crisis*, it is in its own way equally deserving of one last look; a re-cap of its highlights and an assessment of its merits. Interspersed with my own narrative will be a series of quotes from the book's creator, Valentino—in wich he offers his own commentary, adds new insights, and answers the questions left in the wake of the series' completion.

Join us now, as we get normal.

### The Vault of Amazing Action

"normalman was a *very conscious decision on both mine and originally Aardvark-Vanaheim's part to be a little more commercial. We weren't making any bones about it, and I won't make any bones about it now. It was to be commercial. We figured the time was probably right for a superhero parody, and I think we thought right as witness all the superhero parodies that have come out since normalman.*"

The character normalman first appeared in a two-part "Unique Story" which ran in *Cerebus* #56-57. That story was continued directly into the first issue of *normalman*, which was cover-dated January, 1984. Announced as a twelve-issue limited series, it would take two years in the telling.

In terms of format, the first issue set the example that would be followed throughout the run of the book. Each cover would be designed to parody the style of a different comic company. Usually, the interior would also be tailored to spoof a particular style of comic, though the degree to which this was done varied greatly from issue to issue.

The first issue parodied the Mort Weisinger-edited Superman stories of the early 1960s. Even the in-house ads running in this issue were designed to emulate those of two decades earlier. Valentino did his homework well, a fact attested to by the accuracy of his wide-ranging spoofs.

He was familiar with every cliche and convention—from the standard plots long driven into the ground to the idiosyncrasies of other comic writers. He constantly pointed out the foolishness of it all. Yet at the same time he tipped his hat in salute to those who had gone befoe him, as when he inserted a Carmine Infantino-like caption box into the story.

Several of the plot threads that would be carried throughout the series were evident from the very beginning. As an infant, normalman had been rocketed from his home-world of Arnold by his father, a junior CPA who believed the planet was about to explode (it didn't). norm drifted in space for 20 years, growing to young manhood before finally landing on the planet Levram. It was a world completely populated by superbeings. Every one of its inhabitants possessed super abilities of some sort. Everyone but norm, that is.

This fact earned him the hatred of the maniacal Ultra-Conservative U-C vowed to kill the new arrival, lest his normalcy upset the status quo. Fortunately, norm had friends (?) in the persons of the mighty but dim-witted Captain Everything and the ever-violent Sgt. Fluffy, agent of S.C.H.M.U.C.K. It is evidence of how well Valentino knew the comic readers' mentality that he always inserted an asterisk after the title S.C.H.M.U.C.K., which we all knew denoted a footnote that would explain what the initials meant. Every time we referred to said note, however, it always greeted us with the same message: "Stands for nothing in particular." Yet such was our indoctrination that we always took a look, just on the chance that at some point it *would* stand for something. This first issue also introduced one of the series' most popular running gags, in

the form of the Legion of Superfluous Heroes and their never-ending roll call.

Superhero parodies were certainly nothing new, though, and it would take much more than broad spoof and buffoonery to sustain this series. Ultimately, the strip would rise or fall on Valentino's ability to tell a genuine story—and on the character of normalman himself.

*"What I was really trying to hit on in the early part of the series was that here was a guy completely out of his element, in an environment that he absolutely did not belong in. And he was trying to cope with it without having any points of reference at all. He had spent 20 years in a rocket ship and was essentially an absolute virgin, in every way that you can imagine. He was like an infant and he was set on this planet, and naturally he was scared out of his mind. To make an analogy: take the country boy and put him in New York City—and magnify that by a thousand."*

The cover and story in issue #2 were modeled after those of Marvel in the mid-60s, being written in a manner that lampooned the hyperbolic style of Stan Lee. The issue also presented a flashback, re-telling the origin of normalman—something which, for the sake of new readers, should probably have been done in the premiere issue.

*"Arnold? His home planet obviously is supposed to be Krypton, and at first I thought of naming it after another element—Argon or something like that—which they've used for the Squadron Supreme, right? That's Hyperion's world. I think, or whatever the hell it is. Anyway, I thought of using another element, then I thought: no, no, no, that's been done four thousand times—I just want a stupid name for this planet. So 'Arnold' came up—and it was the stupidest name I could think to call a planet. That may not make any sense in hindsight. I just wanted something that sounded un-planetlike. And anybody whose name is Arnold who reads this—I don't mean any offense by that, honestly. I'm gonna get letters from the Legion of Arnolds, right?"*

In this chapter, as throughout the series, the issue of violence is addressed. One character in the story refers to "our fans' near-insatiable lust for gratuitous violence and frivolous fisticuffs." The words flow from the mouth of Capt. Everything, but they were born in the mind of his creator.

*"I was never really a Nick Fury fan. Ever. Any sort of militarism goes completely and totally against my nature. . . . I find that attitude repellent. Sgt. Fluffy was a real jab at that. Take a look at those books in the top ten and what are they? They're excuses for several guys in funny costumes to punch several other guys in funny costumes. I call it 'Mutants disembowelling one another over Metropolis.' That's basically all they are. Therein comes the satire. Not the parody. The parody was gentle . . . but the satire had barbs to it."*

As the second issue ends, norm is confronted by the villainous Pope of Pain. Aiding the Pope are his minions: Old Maid, the Trendoid, Man-Man, and the beautiful woman who

THE AVENGERS
normalman
FEATURING
NORM #2
Man-Man
Sgt. Fluffy
Old Maid
Trendoid
Pope of Pain
Pope of Pain
Pope of Pain

*only way that he could in that particular situation. But it affected him greatly and deeply after that. And the reason I did that is to show that there are consequences to violence. Too often, that's ignored."*

Back on Levram, Sgt. Fluffy convinced Sophisticated Lady to join S.C.H.M.U.C.K.—and he himself was confronted by a shadowy character known as the Cephalopod. And for the first time, it is really brought to our attention that the macho Fluffy is wearing a rather feminine pair of glistening red slippers.

On Earth-Twinkey, normalman took an angry stand, declaring that the senseless fighting between the Smelfs and the ogres must end. This was the first time norm had tried to take control of a situation rather than letting circumstances control him. It marks a turning point in his development. He also gains an important bit of information, as one of the Smelfs tells him that to return to Arnold, norm need only "look for the magic."

This issue also displays one of the weaknesses marring the series in its early days. Cartoonist Joshua Quagmire's character Cutey Bunny puts in a totally gratuitous appearance—for no other reason than that Valentino wanted to plug the work of a friend and give him a tip of the hat. He did this several times early on, even dropping little messages to buddies in the borders. While it was doubtless meant as a nice gesture, it often disrupted the flow of the story and gave the book a look and feel of amateurism that it didn't need.

As the story nears its climax, norm suddenly vanishes from Earth-Twinkey, to make probably the most unexpected guest appearance imaginable—in the pages of *Journey* #13.

*"One thing that bothered me was never addressed. I have read in several reviews and in letter column of* Journey *that a lot of people considered it a real cheap shot that normalman was involved in Journey's storyline. Well, that's an opinion people can have, and they certainly have a right to it. I was a little bit annoyed that (Journey creator) Bill Loebs didn't state the fact that it was his idea to do that—not mine. That really—it bothered me a great deal that he didn't say that. I just want to say that for the record—that really it was his idea to do a crossover. And as it turned out, I think it helped the normalman character a great deal. It provided a growing point for him."*

As issue #4 ended, normalman found himself on yet another parallel world: Earth Dismal. Unfortunately, that is a fairly accurate description of the story contained therein.

*"In #5, I think I tried for too much. I think it was too diffused as a result. I wanted to do Mickey Mouse and Richie Rich and Uncle Scrooge and also Ronald Reagan—and I wanted to do it all together in one book."*

norm finds himself in the company of Mickey Money—a mouse with the body of Richie Rich and the avaricious nature of Uncle Scrooge. norm woefully observes that, no matter where he goes, one thing remains constant: "On every world I've been on . . . the *only* answer that seems to be consistent is *violence*." As we have seen, this theme also remained consistent thoughout the series.

*"I don't believe comics in any way, shape or form create juvenile delinquents out of kids. What created delinquents is bad parental guidance. But I don't think comics are helping matters any when they turn these incredibly violent individuals into heroes. People like the Hulk. People like the Thing. To me, Superman is a hero because he stands for a certain ideal, but there are other characters whose heroism is suspect at best."*

With all that he has experienced, normalman actually finds himself wanting to return to Levram. There too, the violence has continued to escalate; as the Cephalopod shoots and presumably kills Sgt. Fluffy. Captain Everything, who has been combing the myriad dimensions in search of normalman, now finds his friend and returns with him to Levram. For all his many faults, the good Captain was the one person upon whom norm could always depend; there was no trace of deceit or betrayal in him.

*"I created Captain Everything when I was about ten. When all the other kids—when we'd play superheroes, they all wanted to be Superman or Batman. I wanted to be Capt. Everything—he could beat them all, because he could do anything. Eventually, he became a humorous character to me. I'd like to get a series going with him some time this year. It'll be a short, 2 or 3-issue miniseries in 'Unique Stories.' It'll be him and Max the Magnificent together, which'll be a nice juxtaposition.*

*There's been an awful lot of confusion about who Captain Everything really is; whether he's Superman, which a lot of people think—or Captain Marvel, which a lot of other people think. Actually, he's neither one. He's George of the Jungle in superhero rag—if you look at his costume, it's Mighty Mouse's outfit, right down to the lettering across the chest. Cap is dumb with a capital 'D.' His philosophy is that everything he's around is perfect."*

**The NORMALMAN/JOURNEY crossover—it may have stuck in some fans' craws, but provided an opportunity for norm to grow.**

Visually speaking, issue #6 was one of the most successful parodies, as Valentino paid tribute to the venerable Will Eisner. Each page of the story contained the title of the book, rendered in an appropriately Eisner-esque manner—displayed on a billboard, formed by cascades of falling water, etc.

In a wonderfully understated scene, the virginal normalman asks the sexy Sophisticated Lady when she discovered her particular power, to which the lady replies simply "puberty." It was marvelously refreshing that norm's sex life was not one of oppressive sturm und drang. Quite the opposite: each amorous encounter left him renewed and jubilant.

norm's newfound assertiveness again makes itself felt in this issue. He actually punches out a hired thug who had abducted him, angrily proclaiming, "I'm tired of everyone on this planet pushing me around . . . from now on, I'm fighting back!"

The evil Cephalopod is shot and killed at the climax of the story. While his face was never completely revealed, enough of it was shown to reveal that he looked remarkably similar to Commissioner Dolan from the *Spirit* comic strip.

*"Cephalopod is the class of animal that octopi and squid belong to. The reason I used that name was because one of the Spirit's major villains—whom you never ever saw—was called the Octopus, and another one was called the Squid. They were essentially the same person, I would gather. So I used the genus that those two animals belong to."*

The Cephalapod's killer was none other than Sgt. Fluffy—who revealed that it had only been his idential Clone Decoy who had been slain the issue before. Unfortunately for him, the Cephalopod's faithful henchman Rotten Kid was lurking nearby. He fired a single well-placed bullet, and this time the real Sgt. Fluffy died—more or less.

And normalman was still no closer to home than he had been when the series began.

## Agent of Star Classics

*"Issue #7 is a definite juncture point between the first year of the series and the second year of the series. But here again I think I just strove for too much and tried to squeeze it in too quickly. It is probably my least favorite issue of the whole bunch. I think it's the issue that falls down the most and has the least amount of focus."*

Issue #7 did indeed attempt to cover a great deal of territory. Capt. Everything and his comrades in the Justice League of Society engage in three separate battles with three different teenaged super-teams: the A-Men, the Tight Teens, and the Cloned Kids. As it turns out, they weren't really different groups at all, but rather clones of each other. Valentino makes an even deeper jab at the interchangeability of super-teams when he shows the heroes of the JLS change their costumes and return to "work" as the Flighty Fantenders.

The Ultra-Conservative, from whom little had been heard for several issues, now announced that he would be running in the upcoming election for President of Levram. As for the current President,

**Valentino's tribute to Will Eisner's Spirit splash pages. Can you see where it says "normalman" in this illustration?**

he had asked Sophisticated Lady to assume the position as head of S.C.H.M.U.C.K., left vacant by the death of Sgt. Fluffy. This offer she accepts—though she turns down a more personal one.

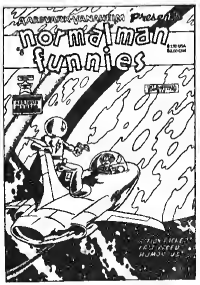
normalman had come upon a scientist named Mr. Nose Et Al, who had salvaged the rocket ship that brought norm to Levram and was in the process of repairing it. Possessed now of the means to return to Arnold, norm naturally asks Sophie to accompany him. As on the occasion of his first attempted departure, however, the lady spurns his request. Disheartened yet determined to return home, norm sets out alone—though not for long. He soon finds himself forced into the company of a frog-like media mogul named Max the Magnificent.

The most significant event in this issue, in terms of reader response, involved the Legion of Superfluous Heroes. After more than a year, the mammoth clan was on the verge of finally completing the reading of roll call—when circumstances of their own making lead to a massive explosion that destroys the entire group. Many fans were not amused.

*"The Legion of Superfluous Heroes was a running gag throughout the first six issues of the book. It started out originally—I wasn't planning on running it through as many issues as it went through. A lot of people reacted real well to it, and I just sort of kept it going—it provided a little break in the action. But when I blew them up in #7, a lot of people got angry about that—they actually wanted to see this group in action! They thought I had cheated them, because they didn't get to see this group in action. They obviously missed the joke, which was: there were so many members in the group that they would have been able to do absolutely nothing more than what they did do, which was essentially trip over each others feet to such an extent that they wound up destroying themselves."*

The cover to issue #8 carried what was probably the most obscure parody in terms of reader recognition. Though the story inside was a spoof of Star Wars, the cover came from a Golden Age comic entitled Famous Funnies. Valentino's reason for using it was twofold.

*"I used that cover because the Star Wars comic is done by Marvel, and I had made the decision early on that I didn't want to parody the same comic book company twice. Reason #2 is, there's this Frank Frazetta cover for an issue of* Famous Funnies




*that is just gorgeous. I wanted to do a parody of that cover just because it was so beautiful. Issue #8 is probably my favorite cover in the whole series."*

Be that as it may, it is doubtful that the story inside deserves equal accolades. Since most of the Star Wars series (of motion pictures) is little more than a travesty itself, attempting to parody it is tantamount to flogging the proverbial dead horse. There is little of consequence to be found here.

norm is taken captive by the mysterious leader of the Federation—Lord R. Nader. While sitting in his cell, norm is visited by the "ghost" of Wolverine MacAlistaire (from *Journey*), who helps him and Max the Magnificent make their escape.

When Max learns that norm came from Levram, however, he turns a ray gun on him. It seems that the rest of the galaxy wants nothing to do with any inhabitant of that crazy planet. Max forces norm back into his spaceship and launches it towards Levram. Unfortunately, the controls had not been programmed correctly, and the tiny ship hurtles not only through space but time as well. This would lead to norm's first meeting with a character who would play a major role in the remainder of the series.

*"Issue #8 is where norm really took it upon himself to start taking more control, and I think a lot of that had to do with his relationship with Wolverine MacAlistaire. norm looked at him as the only normal, average person that he had met up to that point—and he could take care of himself. norm really looked up to him as somebody he admired greatly."*

The most significant event to occur in issue #8 took place back on Levram, where the current President was assassinated. His closest advisor, Union Man, suggests there is only

one person who could successfully run against the Ultra-Conservative—Sophisticated Lady.

Issue #9 bore a cover modeled after *Classics Illustrated*, simply because those books had such a recognizable logo. The interior, however, had as its source of reference the European comic strip *Asterix*.

Sophisticated Lady has declined the offer to run for President of Levram, fearing that her past life as a call girl would dash any hope she had of winning. To her mind, there is only one other logical candidate. Need I tell you her choice?

At that moment, though, the potential candidate had more pressing problems. Finding himself stranded in Levram's version of ancient Rome, norm is captured and forced into gladiatorial service in the Coliseum.

As he is about to sally forth to face a horde of hungry lions and tigers, norm is approached by an unidentified stranger (Asterix), who gives him a magic potion that will temporarily endow a man with super strength. It is through this potion that norm inadvertently triggers a chain

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of events that will lead to the eventual population of the planet by a race composed entirely of super beings.

The potion works as advertised, and norm is triumphant. The Emperor Caesar indulges the whim of a lovely female companion by giving her possession of the bespectacled warrior.

Later, the lady appears before normalman in an outrageously provocative pink costume, claiming to have traveled from Levram's far future. More than this, she says, "I am the woman who will be your future—I am the Countess of Monte Cristo!"

*"There wasn't anyone to start out with who was the visual basis for the Countess. She was an original character. But somebody pointed out to me, after seeing her, that her costume was very reminiscent of a costume that Princess Projectra wore. And I wasn't aware of that when I created her costume. Actually, I created her costume after looking at a costume Joshua Quagmire created for his villainess, Vicki the fox. But she wasn't really based on any character per se. She was created to be Betty—the Betty/Veronica Syndrome, okay? Sophisticated Lady being the dark, her being the blonde. Not necessarily that she was Betty in any of her characteristics, but I knew I was going to do Archie as the last issue, and figured I needed two women for him to play off of—one dark, one light. Another reason that she was created was to throw a red herring into the relationship between normalman and Sophisticated Lady."*

The lady claims to have been an archeologist from 1,000 years ahead of normalman's time, who had traveled back to ancient Rome specifically to meet him. She tells him that she knows what The Magic is that the Smelfs had urged him to find. As she seductively unbuttons norm's shirt, she promises to lead him to it—if, in return, he will take her with him to Arnold.

Since one of the Countess's powers is that of time travel, it is a simple matter for her to return with norm to the present day. There, Sophisticated Lady tells him that the only way he can gain access to The Magic is if he successfully runs for the office of President. Thus, though she truly loves norm, Sophie uses him to achieve what she thinks is best for her homeworld.

By doing so, she sets the stage for the climax of the series.

## American Earth Pig's Guys 'n' Gals

*"The parodies in several of the last six issues were the strongest parodies. The Cerebus issue (#10) is extremely Cerebus—I think it's probably the best parody of the bunch, personally. It's probably my favorite book in the series."*

One of the more noticeable changes in the series was that Valentino was no longer relying so heavily on Marvel and DC for his sources of parody. Indeed, parody as a whole was beginning to take a back seat to the unfolding story of normalman's dilemma. This move definitely strengthened the book. From this point onward, the reader was not so interested in spotting the various in-jokes as he or she was in simply following the ongoing drama.

In this issue, the Countess begins to show the devious side of her nature—meeting secretly with the Ultra-Conservative to make him an offer she hoped he couldn't refuse. If he will kill Sophisticated Lady, the Countess promises to assure that normalman will leave Levram for good. Self-exile isn't good enough for the Ultra-Conservative, however—he will

be satisfied with nothing less than the death of normalman.

Meanwhile, norm has grown increasingly tired of the madness which is political campaigning. Affecting him even more deeply is the anger and hurt he feels because Sophie has forced him into the race. He sneaks away from his entourage long enough to drown his sorrows in booze.

*"normalman was getting more or less manipulated by the women around him, as opposed to the other way around. Every single woman that he had sex with—and there were only three—all three times he was the one that was seduced. He didn't seduce them.*

*He was holding Sophie up to a certain standard, and yet he was ready and willing at all points to lose his fidelity to her. And he didn't think anything of it. That's an example, not necessarily of his badness—just his naivete. He didn't realize this at first. Sophie was also guilty in the relationship of using him. So sometimes your emotions get confused, and the emotions between people get confused. But in the end, of course, they got married and lived happily ever after."*

In the midst of his drunken stupor, norm once again finds himself visited by a ghostly visitor—Cerebus the aardvark. The ever-cynical Cerebus warns norm that he should never trust anyone. More importantly, he at last reveals to norm just what The Magic is—it is the pair of ruby slippers that had been worn by the late Sgt. Fluffy.

*"A lot of people had asked where the ruby slippers came from—how did Sgt. Fluffy get them away from Dorothy (of The Wizard of Oz)? It hit me like a flash of lightning one night that he didn't really get them from Dorothy—Dorothy got them from him. He had them first. Now, where he got them from—I don't know."*

When sobriety returns, anger comes with it, as norm realizes that Sophie has known all along what The Magic was. Feeling betrayed, he isolates himself from everyone but the faithful Captain Everything. For her part, Sophisticated Lady is heartbroken but determined to carry out her plan, convinced that if normalman ever leaves Levram it will signal the doom of her world.

It comes as a shock to everyone when, while debating the Ultra-Conservative, normalman announces that he has chosen Sophie to be his vice-presidential running mate. With

his personal life a shambles, norm experiences no great joy when he goes on to win the election.

Issue #11, a parody of *American Flagg!* was in my opinion, the most successful in its attempts to reflect the various facets of the original model. The cover, the letter and news pages, the shading effects used on the artwork, the situations depicted—all closely emulate the *Flagg!* formula; and without sacrificing or diluting Valentino's own story in any way.

normalman celebrates his inauguration as President by going to bed—with the sinfully Nasty Girl of the Justice League of Society. The next morning he is prepared to go to work, until he learns the truth about the office he now holds.

It turns out that when all the inhabitants of Levram inherited super powers they also developed an insatiable lust for battle. To control some of the chaos, a bureaucracy formed which presented these battles to the populace as a form of entertainment. Within this system, the President is little more than a figurehead, with no real authority.

norm also discovers why the women of Levram find him so attractive. The native male superheros expend so much physical energy in combat that they have none left over for sex. This also explains why there are very few children on Levram, and why Sophisticated Lady is so determined that norm remain. It is her hope that he will father a new race; one composed of normal human beings.

In a related but totally unexpected vein, poor Captain Everything falls head-over-heels in love with the Countess of Monte Cristo—who is still completely absorbed in her plan to help normalman return to Arnold.

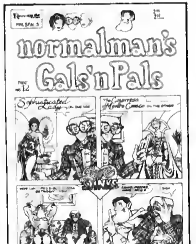
Meanwhile, norm discovers that the ruby slippers have been stolen. This proves to be the last straw. An enraged normalman seeking to track down the slippers, lays into a gang of street hoods with guns blazing—for one moment giving into the mindless violence which pervades the entire world.

*"normalman started resorting to violence and he started becoming very much a cynic toward the things that were going on around him, which I think is a very natural reaction. He began as an innocent, he became an idealist, and then went through cynicism. And part of his frustration was coming out in semi-violent terms."*

norm later learns that the slippers had been taken by Sophisticated Lady in a last-ditch effort to force him to remain on Levram. Though the two of them deeply loved each other, their separate needs seemed to plant an insurmountable barrier between them. norm could never fit in on Levram, and was consumed by the desire to return to the planet that represented home and family to him. Sophie, on the other hand, felt duty dictated that she remain on Levram and try to save it from its drive toward self-destruction.

Emotionally beaten, she surrenders the slippers to norm, who states that, after taking some time to gather his thoughts, he will use them to return to Arnold. Then, in his last official act as President of Levram, he resigns from office—turning the position over to Sophie.

*"Until I did normalman, I'd never writtten a story over eight pages long. To write a story that's over 200 pages long—it becomes kind of like a first novel experience, and there were places where things just got sort of bogged down under their own weight. My least favorite issues, I mentioned, were issue 5 and issue 7. And I think issue 12 too—those three issues, I think, were really low points in the*








*series. But you do the best you can."*

In regard to issue #12, Valentino's self-assessment was overly harsh. As the penultimate issue, it did everything needed to set up the conclusion of the series. Its cover was modeled after those of the Archie Comics Group, and its woeful theme throughout was the fact that "Love Stinks."

In a scene that was simultaneously sad and hilarious, the love-stricken Captain Everything asks the Countess for her hand in marriage. His prominent jaw literally drops several inches as she explains that she can't marry him because of her love for normalman.

We also learn the reason behind the Countess's desire to migrate to Arnold. Once there, she intends to augment her own powers with those generated by the ruby slippers and use that power to rule the planet. To further her plans, she has slipped a potion into Sophisticated Lady's private wine stock—which will enforce Sophie's desire to remain on Levram while also turning the love she feels for normalman into hatred.

Meanwhile, in a cemetery, Ultra-Conservative and Rotten Kid are setting up an ominous-looking device called the Quasi-Majik Responsometer. With it, they intend to kill normalman.

The new President of Levram, Sophisticated Lady, has searched her heart and come to a decision regarding her own course of action. Letting her love for norm overrule her devotion to Levram, she is determined to leave with him when he returns to Arnold—until she partakes of a glass of spiked wine that is. Under its effect, she has nothing but contempt for normalman.

As for norm himself, he is once again (unsuccessfully) seeking solace from a bottle. Sitting alone in a tavern, he is approached by a character who had not been seen since issue #3—Man-Man, the gangsta hero. It is Man-Man who explains to him the ritual involved in making the ruby slippers work (which all Oz fans know by heart). He also leaves norm with a few words of wisdom that apply to us all: you can't depend on someone else to make you happy—you've got to be happy with yourself first.

*"There were a lot of complaints towards the end of the series, where people didn't think it was funny any more, because we weren't doing the hardcore parody and normalman was no longer the nebbish that he was at the beginning. But this book took place over a period of two years, that's how long it took in normalman's actual chronologi-*

*cal time—he aged two years. And during that time, he had an awful lot of experiences. There's no way in the world he could have been the same character at the end of the series that he was at the beginning."*

Buoyed by a new determination to face whatever life might bring, norm prepared to use the ruby slippers. The end was in sight.

## Over the Rainbow

*"An awful lot of people have written in asking me to continue the series, and why can't it go on, especially considering the fact that normalman lives in the end? normalman himself explained it in the Annual: he's no longer normalman now—he's Norm-L, an average person on an average planet, where being super is not part of the norm, it's completely un-average. The entire basis of normalman is that he lives on a planet where everybody's super-heroic. Now, once we've destroyed that planet, the entire basis for the series is non-existent. That's why there will never be another—there won't be a normalman II."*

In terms of production, all the stops were pulled out for the *normalman 3-D Annual* which concludes the series. The book contains some of the finest 3-D effects ever achieved in comics, thanks to the combined efforts of Valentino and Ray Zone. A color centerspread, two-step animation, a 3-D photo of Valentino and publisher Deni Loubert—every step of the way it is a stunning visual treat.

As normalman dons the magic ruby slippers, he is confronted by a tearful Captain Everything. It is genuinely touching as Cap begs norm not to leave because "you're my pal!" Still, norm is determined to go, and he agrees to take the Countess with him.

Back in the cemetery, Ultra-Conservative activates his deadly machine. Its effect is rather unexpected, for it resurrects the dead Sgt. Fluffy, who now rises to life as—Dark Fluffy (in a scene that makes splendid use of the 3-D effect). Dark Fluffy's first act is to destroy Ultra-Conservative and Rotten Kid.

In Shuster Square, a throng of superheroes has gathered to see normalman off. Clicking the heels of the ruby slippers together three times and repeating the chant, "There's no place like home," norm and the Countess vanish in a burst of light.

As Captain Everything and Sophisticated Lady console each other, Dark Fluffy appears. He reveals that normalman had somehow served as a stabilizing influence on Levram. With him gone, the senseless violence will begin to escalate, finally reaching out to other worlds. To Fluffy's mind, this leaves him with but one option—he must destroy Levram.

Suddenly, Captain Everything hears the sound of the emergency signal watch he had given normalman, indicating that his friend needs help. With Sophisticated Lady (who has obviously recovered from her drugged drink) in his arms, Cap sets out for Arnold.

After they depart, Dark Fluffy uses his awesome power to completely destroy Levram and all its inhabitants—including two men who resemble a couple of gents named Wolfman and Perez.

In flashback, we are then shown the moment when normalman and the Countess arrive on Arnold. norm discovers that he is a national hero on his home planet—honored as the world's first astronaut! He is then reunited with his mother, Lowra. She informs him that she *shot* his father after he sent norm into space, was susequently acquitted, and became a celebrity as the mother of the first baby in space.

In getting re-acquainted with his mother, norm discovers that his real name actually *is* "Norm." The joy of the moment is shattered, however, when he gives the Countess the ruby slippers. It is when she reveals her true intentions that Norm signals Captain Everything.

Cap and Sophie arrive moments later—illustrating that this series would have ended months earlier if it had only occurred to normalman to simply ask Cap to fly him back to Arnold!

In a dramatic confrontation, Cap is able to direct the Countess's malevolent energies back at her, and she is seemingly destroyed. In actuality, the woman had been hurled

into another dimension—where she ruled as the Wicked Witch of the East until the house bearing little Dorothy from Kansas fell on her.

The series comes to its fitting and joyful conclusion when Norm and Sophie are joined in holy matrimony, with Cap as best man and Valentino as minister. As a grateful populace then carries Captain Everything on their shoulders, a jubilant Norm declares, "All's swell that ends swell!"

And with that, the saga of normalman came to a close.

It had been announced earlier that a "Prequel" would follow the Annual, a special-edition re-printing the two "Unique Stories" that introduced normalman. Those plans have now been cancelled.

*"The reason we didn't go ahead with plans for a prequel primarily was I started to feel guilty and feel like I was going to be milking the series after that point, and I wanted to go out with the bang of the Annual and just let it go at that. People can pick up the back issues of Cerebus; they're not that expensive—yet. I just didn't want to milk it, because we've all seen that done before, and it never leaves a good taste in the mouth. So that's not going to happen."*

In reflecting back on the series as a whole, Valentino expressed his own thoughts and feelings not on *normalman* alone, but on the entire industry as well.

*"It's really tough for me to evaluate the series. I think I accomplished what I set out to do, in that I was able to tell a story of a character's growth, and was able to do it while parodying a whole lot of different conventions and cliches. I think basically I did what I set out to do with it. I'm happy. I'm proud of the series—which I guess for a creator is the best you can say. I think my artwork and my writing abilities have grown immensely via this series. I've learned an awful lot and had a chance to look at some of the greatest cartoonists under a microscope in doing the series. I grew up reading comics, and I love the art form. So this was in a lot of ways an homage to those comics, and to comics in general. I feel good about it—and I hope everybody else does too.*

*"I think I also made some valid statements about the state of the comics industry as it now stands. Like a lot of people, I find it a real shame that supeheroes have totally taken over this industry, to the point where everything else is having a difficult time surviving. And I like superheroes just as much as the next guy, but I think they're eventually going to strangle this industry. And I think, really, it's up to the fans to start looking in other places; look at some of the other things that are being done. Right now seems to be the perfect time. We have a wider diversity of comics available to readers now than ever before—I think even more so than during the Golden Age. And yet 90 percent of those books are dying, while the latest Mutant Extravaganza is selling like hotcakes.*

*"I find that real disheartening, and I think for the overall strength of the industry it doesn't bode well. One of the things I was trying to say in normalman series was, this is real silly. If we can parody it this easily, and if you recognize what I'm talking about—then you've seen it too many times. So now maybe it's time to look at something else. And that's essentially what I was trying to say with all the superheroes, Marvel/DC jokes and that kind of thing; if you can recognize these as cliches and conventions—which they are—then maybe it's time you started looking elsewhere for entertainment. Why go back to the same books, to the same characters, to the same situations over and over and over again? I think these are things the comic fans really have to start addressing if they want comics to continue.*

*"I'm not an optimist about the future of comics. And my failure to be optimistic is due in large part to what I see going on in the direct sales market. In the capitulation by the comic book industry to pander to that market, and by what I see the fans doing constantly. I know people who swear up and down that they've never read anything but a Marvel comic—and I think that's pathetic. I don't want those kind of people in fandom. I want the kind of person in fandom who, even if they don't like it, will take a chance. Instead of buying an issue of Mucus Man that you're not interested in, just because you're trying to keep up your collection—buy something else that you might like. There's a lot of stuff out there to buy."*

For whatever it may be worth, my own opinion of *normalman*, in large part, mirrors that of Valentino. There is no need or sense in over-estimating its worth. It did not break new ground; it will not revolutionize the industry; it will not go down in history as one of the finest examples of comics literature. Such was not its intent.

Valentino merely set out to tell a story, which he did admirably. A genuine story, with a beginning, middle and end—something most mainstream mini-series don't have. And because it *was* a genuine story, it was able to incorporate one of the main requisites for literature—the portrayal of a protagonist who has experienced some sort of change, growth, development during the course of the story. This does not occur in most comic-book mini-series; forget regular series, wherein real changes occur rarely if ever.

For all its outward facade of superheroics and time-space travel, *normalman* was at heart a simple and gentle story of a young man trying to find happiness. It was a love story with a maturity perhaps masked by its cartoon appearance; the tale of two people groping to become one. It had a warmth and charm far beyond many of the other comics on the stand today.

Most of all, it had characters worth caring about. And it is only right that we conclude this piece with Valentino's thoughts on those characters he created, and whom so many readers came to love.

*"I like normalman a lot. I like him as a person. I see him as being a character with a lot of flaws, like most of us have. I think he has a lot of personal integrity. I think he's shown both throughout the series. I think he stumbled an awful lot; I think he fell flat on his face a lot of times. And I think he always picked himself back up again, and had the strength to persevere—and I find that an admirable trait in anyone. I was glad to see him happy in the end, and to leave happy, and to lead a happy life, because up until the end his life was just one consistent series of miseries. So I like him a great deal.*

*"Sophie I'm not real sure about, but I think she'll come around in the end. And I think she really does love norm, even though she had odd ways of showing it at times.*

*"I just love Captain Everything. He cracks me up—he always has, and he probably always will. I get a real good feeling every time I look at Cap; every time I think about him and I think how crazy he is. I would like to know him; he seems like he'd be fun.*

*"And I'd like to know somebody like normalman too."* ●

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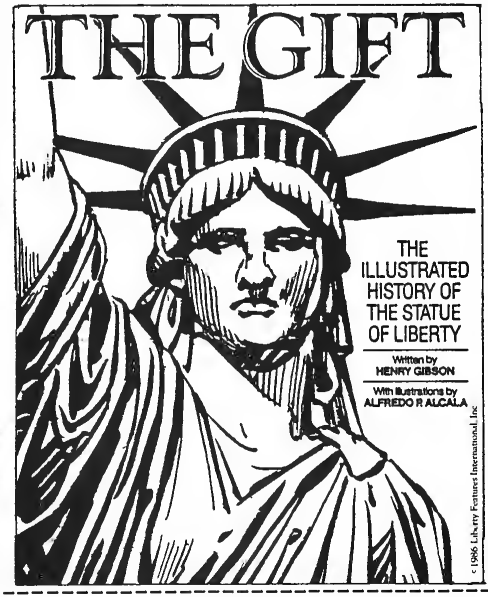


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# VALENTINO

By Mark Waid

**AH:** *First, describe life after normalman. How wonderful a feeling was it to relinquish those last Annual pages to Renegade and be done with it?*

**VALENTINO:** (Laughs) I was, unfortunately, too busy to celebrate. Which may be unfortunate and may not be, because before *normalman* I was searching for work, and after it I had so much work that I couldn't stop and think about it. There was a great sigh of relief, finally. I had seen the project through to the end, something that I had had grave fears about. When I first started, I had never taken on a project of that magnitude—before I did *normalman*, I think the longest story I'd ever done was eight pages. To take on a 13-issue series was quite a leap, and I had some doubts as to whether or not I could do it—on the other hand, I was pretty confident walking into it. Cocky, almost.

**AH:** *How did you fall into Mythadventures from there?*

**VALENTINO:** It happened while I was working on the *normalman Annual*. I had approached some publishers already about some new series of my own, and had bites on *Ace, the Kid from Outer Space* and *Max the Magnificent*. There were problems with the people I was talking with about *Max*, which we won't go into. WaRP was interested in *Ace*, which I had originally sent to DC for their kiddie line before that fell through the basement floor.

Then I got this eleventh-hour phone call from Joellyn Dorkin. She told me that WaRP would be putting out this full-color annual, they'd gotten most of the stories in, they were ten days away from presstime, they asked Phil Foglio where his story was, and he told them he wasn't going to do it.

**AH:** *Ouch.*

**VALENTINO:** Yeah. They needed eight pages written, pencilled, inked, lettered and colored—all in ten days. They asked if I could do it. The reason Joellyn called me about it was that (a) we had been talking [about Ace], and (b) she'd seen a piece of graffiti in my *Munden's Bar* story that said, "Kiss My Aahz." I don't know why she remembered that (*laughs*), but she figured that I might be a *Mythadventures* fan. She asked if I was at all familiar with it, and I said that I thought it was great, and in talking with her and with Bob Asprin within the next few hours, I told her I'd do the story.

Afterwards, they both sort of danced around asking me if I'd even consider taking over the book if Phil did indeed leave, something that was still very uncertain at that time. I asked them what the deal was, what it entailed and so forth, and it seemed like the best move to make. It seemed like the one move that would separate me almost completely from *normalman*, which is what I wanted.

I was getting to the point where, every single time I came up with a new character, somebody wanted to know who I was parodying. It's a problem after a while. I imagine that [*Megaton Man*'s] Donald Simpson is going through the same thing. I'm pretty sure that's why he's doing "Border Worlds" right now. He wants to do something completely different from *Megaton Man*, and, in much the same way, I wanted to do something competely different from *normalman*.

**AH:** *It's still humor.*

**VALENTINO:** But it's a different kind of humor. It's not parody, 'cause it's not satire, it's humor-adventure, humor-fantasy I guess.

**AH:** *Had you read the Myth books before you got the assignment?*

**VALENTINO:** I'd read a couple of them. I still haven't read them all (*laughs*), but I loved them. I even had my wife read them, and after she did, I told her, "Wouldn't those make a great comic?"

We had been talking a few years ago about possibly doing a *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* adaptation. The people that we talked to turned out to be full of hot air, but the talks got me excited about it, and I read the *Myth* books shortly thereafter and thought it would be wonderful stuff to make a good comic out of. Then the Foglio series came out, and I just loved it.

**AH:** *What kind of problems did you have getting started with Myth?*

**VALENTINO:** It was difficult—when I did the eight-pager, I was running blind. I did the job right in the middle of the *normalman Annual*, and I was very much into *normalman* at that point.

**AH:** *How did you have to shift your approach, retool your thinking?*

**VALENTINO:** Hmm. Let me answer that this way—*normalman* taught me, made me grow considerably both as an artist and as a storyteller. By the time I came to *Mythadventures*, I had a much larger vocabulary. Now, with *Mythadventures*, I think the artwork is a quantum leap above what I was doing in *normalman*. Part of that is from what I learned with *normalman*, part of it comes from the

fact that doing just the pencils is giving me more time to be involved with the artwork, the actual layout, backgrounds, and things like that.

**AH:** *What's it been like working with Robert Aspirin?*

**VALENTINO:** It's worked out great. Bob and I really work together well, and we found right from the start that we both had similar ideas and similar motives, and seemed to talk the same language. We get along real well. This is the first time I've ever worked with another writer, and I couldn't have asked for a better relationship. Unfortunately, it just turned out that Bob had his fingers in so many different pies that he was unable to meet the deadlines that we had set up for the book. It was just too much for him.

*Myth* #10 we sort of co-wrote together, and with #11 and #12, he's given me a basic plotline to work from, and I'll probably write both of them. After that, I'll do another adaptation, where I'll try to stay as close to the books as possible.

Issues #9-12 form the new story that bridges *Another Fine Myth* and *Mythconceptions*. At the end of *Another Fine Myth*, Aahz and Skeeve inherit this inn. Aahz is real pleased, because being an innkeeper is a real cushy job. He doesn't have to do much—people come in, they get drunk, they split. *Mythadventures* begins with them doing everything possible to *discourage* people from coming into the inn. We're going to tell the story why.

In issue #9, [Aahz and Skeeve] meet a personage of nobility, the Duke of Pinchpini, who bears a striking resemblance to a certain editor. In #10, they meet the Inn crowd (*hysterical laughter*), in a story called, "I'm In with the Inn Crowd," essentially the jet-set of Khlad, this dimension that Skeeve lives in. In #11, we're going to have a comics convention, and that'll probably carry over into #12 when Pinchpini comes back with his wife, the Duchess of Dreamberry.

**AH:** *All of which, of course, will someday be collected into one of Donning's color volumes a la the Elfquest books. As a matter of fact, Mythadventures One is out now—is it fair to say that these color volumes were a factor in your decision to do Myth?*

**VALENTINO:** Oh, certainly. To be honest, that was probably the telling force in my decision to sign on, the fact that these issues will be reprinted and put in Waldenbooks, which gives me another outlet for my work besides the fan market. I think that [that kind of packaging] can only help the comics industry as a whole, to get out there into other marketplaces besides the direct-sales market, which I think has seen all the growth it's going to see.

**AH:** *We've asked about working with Aspirin, what about working with WaRP?*

**VALENTINO:** It's been okay so far. WaRP has been—oh, I guess a good word is "generous"—with me, in that they've pretty much let me do what I've wanted to do with *Myth* and have gone along with me at almost every turn. They've been very helpful. It's not the same as working for Deni Loubert, though, in the sense that Deni and I are close personal friends. This is more of a business relationship with friendly tones.

**AH:** *What can Valentino bring to Mythadventures?*

**VALENTINO:** That's an extremely difficult question to answer. There were questions asked of me in Dallas, when we first announced that I'd be taking over the book, about whether or not I'd be continuing on in the "Foglio tradition," etc., etc. I think to look at some of my work, though, we're extremely different artists with different sensibilities.

**AH:** *Did you make any special effort to make that transition?*

**VALENTINO:** Well, [Foglio] designed the characters and I'm trying to keep pretty much to that design, but it's just the same as when two artists do Superman—they have two different interpretations of the same character.

The analogy I've made is that if you think of Phil Foglio's *Mythadventures* as Tex Avery, then my *Myth* is Walt Disney. Everything is more lush, there's more attention to background. There'll be more attention to—maybe not so much expression, because Foglio is probably the current master of the gag expression—but to solidity. It's going to be more solid. No shirking backgrounds—you'll be getting your money's worth here.

There are differences in the characters. My Aahz is a lot meaner than Foglio's. Foglio's Aahz was kind of a funny gargoyle. Mine is more menacing, and my reasoning behind that is that Skeeve has been with him for a year as of issue #9, and he's still afraid of him.

**AH:** *The old Aahz was portrayed in a more lightweight fashion.*



**VALENTINO:** Mine foams at the mouth. By now, Skeeve knows that his bark is twenty times worse than his bite, so he has to look real frightening to spark that same reaction from Skeeve after all they've gone through together.

**AH:** *When readers think "humor comic" in today's market, only two or three names readily come to mind, and yours probably comes to the forefront most readily. Talk to me about humor in comics. What makes a comic funny?*

**VALENTINO:** I think humor is a personal vision. I think one of the reasons that Marvel and DC, for example, have never come up with a really funny humor book—with the possible exceptions of *Ambush Bug*, which DC is apparently letting Giffen and Fleming run pretty much solo, and *Groo*, which is an Epic book and obviously very, very Sergio Aragones—is because they try doing it the way that they do a super-hero book, by committee. You can do a super-hero adventure book that way, because of the type of material that is is—but a humor book has to be a personal vision.

Each of us thinks that different things are funny. A book that I might find uproarious might put you to sleep. There is no "key" to humor—it is the most subjective of art forms. As a result, you can't produce it by committee. The humorist has something to say, and usually takes a look at the human condition in a manner that causes us to see a little bit of ourselves. The bumblings of Groo, for instance—I don't know about you, but I've certainly made a fool of myself on several occasions.

**AH:** *I've never sunk a ship, but...*

**VALENTINO:** ... but, basically, there are universal traits and truths that humor seems able to reach out and hit. The real secret to it is that the individual creating it has his own unique vision and is allowed to go forth with that.

Look at the books you consider to be funny. They are indeed written and drawn by one individual nine times out of ten, and that one individual is allowed to see his vision to its ultimate resolution. *Sugar and Spike*, *Bloom County* if you want to delve into comic strips—we could name examples all night. They're a one-man show, a one-man sensibility. That's why there haven't been a great number of really funny comics. I'm afraid they've gone about it all wrong. Those who succeed do so by strongarm tactics, as with *Groo*: fight for artistic independence, or through the publisher's own integrity, as with Deni Loubert, whose own ego doesn't get in the way.

**AH:** *Incredibly rare in this industry.*

**VALENTINO:** *Astoundingly* rare. (*laughs*) We won't go any further than

Valentino's pencil layout for a page of MYTH #11: a comic convention issue.

that now that I've alienated every editor in the business (*more laughter*).

**AH:** *Before we wrap it up, is there anything else you're working on you'd like to talk about? Marvel Productions, Mythadventures, and your family—you don't have time for much else, do you?*

**VALENTINO:** Really. It's taking me about twice as long to do a *Mythadventures* page as it took to do a *normalman* page. I'm consciously trying to put more into it.

**AH:** *And since you're only doing pencils—as opposed to full art on normalman—then that really is quite a lot of time spent on every page.*

**VALENTINO:** We have this new inker named Art Thibert, who I really ought to say something about. He did the last three pages in issue #9 and takes over from Paul Abrams with #10. He came to me through a mutual friend, Brian Murray, a pencil artist for Continuity. Art is a young guy—I'm not sure if he's even 21 yet—and he's very enthusiastic. He's got a bit of growing to do, I think, as a

penciller and as a storyteller, but, as an inker, the work couldn't be any better unless I was doing it myself. I don't mean that to sound egotistical.

**AH:** *You're trying to compliment a guy who has done a good job of complementing your style.*

**VALENTINO:** Exactly. The differences are purely in nuance, which I think he'll get as time progresses. I think he'll be a force to reckon with not so much in humor, which isn't really his forte, but in straight comics, which is where he wants to be.

**AH:** *Back to the question. What lies in the future for Valentino?*

**VALENTINO:** I'm keeping my options open after the first year of *Myth*. Although I haven't signed on for more than 12 issues yet, I've agreed to adapt all of *Mythconceptions*. After that, WaRP and Aspnn and I are all going to have to sit down at the negotiating table and see whether or not my coming on to the book has hurt sales or helped them or whatever. I have a lot of projects that I want to do on my own. I'm developing a straight super-hero book; I'd still like to do *Max the Magnificent* as a series; I'd like to do a mini-series starring Capt. Everything.

Also, I have a science-fiction story in mind and I'm not sure what form it will take. It could be a finite-series comic, but I may want to write it as a novel. I think it might work better as a novel. I know that Kim Thompson is going to fry his *brains* out when he reads this, screaming, "*but he can't spell!!!*"—which is true, I am the world's second worst speller. The real problem is in that science-fiction doesn't sell real well in the comics field, unfortunately, and I don't know how I would target it or market it or anything. Anyway, these are some of the projects that I have in mind, and there are several more that are in even more scribbly stages.

**AH:** *Have you given any thought to what Valentino the artist might be able to learn from working on this book?*

**VALENTINO:** Anytime you're working, you're learning. If you're *not*, you need to move on to something else. But I think you can only evaluate something like that after you leave a project. At this point, I would say that working in the animation field has given me new perspective on what to do in comics: Staging, lighting, continuing—how characters move through space. As to what *Myth* will give to me, I'm not sure at this point, though I think that I'll come away from it much stronger for the next project, whatever it might be. ●

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*After a brief career at* HA! *magazine, Mark Waid is now working for* Honkl *magazine.*

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## A HERO HISTORY

By Richard Gagnon

*The Dazzler* is easily one of the worst comics that the Marvel Comics Group has ever put out. In spite of that, the sales haven't been all that bad—it took a full 42 issues for it to be cancelled. The 1983 circulation figures indicated that the comic fared only a little below Marvel's average sales figures. *Dazzler* is a throwback to the headlight comics of the '50s, displaying lots of tits and ass and little more of substance.

The *Dazzler* was created at the height of the disco craze, but wasn't published until disco was already on the wane. Marvel eventually moved away from the disco background because, as Tom DeFalco explained, "... around the time of the fifth cancellation, we figured that, by the time the book came out, Disco would be dead."

## Dazzler's Creation

The original idea to create a singer who has super-powers, came not from Marvel Comics, but from Casablanca Records. As Louise Jones explained, "Casablanca just came to Marvel and said, 'Hey, you make a singer and we'll create someone to take on the persona!' The idea was to have a singer tour the country dressed as the Marvel character, whereby both the comic and the singer would both gain free publicity by each other's appearances. It was an interesting method of crossover promotion.

The working title for Marvel's tie-in comic was the "Disco Queen." The character went through various incarnations and powers. At one point Dazzler was going to be a funky black woman. Dazzler's original powers were to have been the ability to force people to tell the truth, a power which would have had a devastating effect in a disco setting. Those powers didn't last very long, according to Roger Stern: "When we originally had her making people tell the truth we didn't have a name for her. So we said that this isn't really a great power because she wasn't supposed to be strictly a superhero. We were trying to tie her into all the sparkle and flash of the music business. We were throwing ideas around and names back and forth, and we were at some restaurant and I said, 'How about the Dazzler?' So we wrote that down and ended up with it. ... It's a great name. It tells what she does right off, which is always nice."

Tom DeFalco became involved with the Dazzler comic around June of 1979 and decribed at that time that, "Very simply, nobody wanted to have anything to do with it. Except for one girl: Dickie McKenzie. She was interested in it. At the time, they were talking about something along the lines of an *Archie* character or something like that." The choice of Tom DeFalco was a natural one, as DeFalco has been a writer for the Archie comics line. While Marvel was the creative force behind the Dazzler character, Casablanca Records had approval authority over the initial plots and concepts. It took Tom DeFalco and Jim Shooter a few tries before they came up with something that satisfied the record company. That plot formed the basic story that made up the first two issues of the *Dazzler* series.

Some time before the first appearance of the *Dazzler* comic, Casablanca commissioned Jim Shooter to write a treatment for what was to be an animated Dazzler TV special. Casablanca then decided that a live theatrical movie would prove a more spectacular debut of the character. John and Bo Derek were approached with the property and appeared to express some interest in casting Bo as the Dazzler. Financial difficulties at Casablanca forced them to finally drop completely out of the Dazzler project. (On some character sketches released by Marvel, however, Dazzler bears a noticeable resemblance to Bo Derek.)

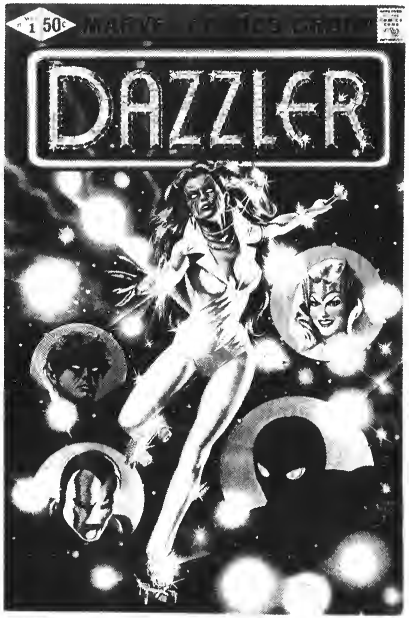
Marvel, in the meantime, was holding back the *Dazzler* comic until firm arrangements could be made with Casablanca Records to release the comic when they were ready to debut their Dazzler look-alike. Marvel guested Dazzler in a number of their comics (*X-Men*, *Spider-Man*, and the *Fantastic Four*) as a gesture of confidence in the tie-in concept. Difficulties with Casablanca forced the scheduling and cancelling of *The Dazzler* some five or six times before the first issue finally appeared.

Marvel tried to interest other movie companies and recording outfits in becoming involved with the Dazzler project, but were unsuccessful. That led them to finally place the *Dazzler* comic on their publishing schedule. Dazzler had originally been scheduled to appear as an issue of *Marvel Comics Super Special*, the format used for most of Marvel's movie adaptations. Consideration was later given to doing the comic as a black and white magazine, still trying to make Dazzler's first appearance something of a special event. The idea of doing a magazine finally died down after Casablanca pulled out of the project. It was then that Marvel decided to release *Dazzler* as two 17-page comics. Further delays forced the addition of new original art to the comic to meet the new page count of the 50-cent comic, which had gone from 17 to 22 pages.

Right around the time that Casablanca pulled out of the Dazzler tie-in, Marvel was rapidly becoming aware that direct-sales comics shops were becoming a significant factor in comic sales. The shops, at that time, were accounting for some 30 percent of Marvel comic sales. Marvel decided to give *Dazzler* a big send-off by making it Marvel's first direct-sales-only experimental comic. Expectations were high and dealers ordered 400,000 copies of *Dazzler*'s first issue, making it the most successful comic of the 1970s.

To help the direct sales distributors, Marvel compiled a list of direct sales outlets and their addresses with a note that a copy of *Dazzler* could be purchased through them. That list appeared in the back of *Dazzler* #2. It was the first time that a major comic book company had intentionally bypassed the traditional method of selling a comic on the newsstands. Smaller publishers had sold their comics at direct-sales outlets because they lacked the backing to obtain nationwide newsstand distribution.

The *Dazzler* comic had one of the most impressive debuts of any recent comic with first issue sales that were double that of anything else. *Dazzler* #1 was made an instant collectible with its unique direct sales marketing strategy. Dazzler had already been connected with the X-Men, where she made her debut in a series that was then already becoming a major fan phenomenon. Even *The Comics Journal* begrudgingly admitted that, in a review by Dale Luciano, who liked the first two issues of *Dazzler* as a kind of camp character. If the *Dazzler* comic failed to retain the huge audience it started with, it did so by not being a very well done comic. The Dazzler title was certainly given every chance that it should have needed to become a success with its remarkable debut.

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## Dazzler and the Marvel Universe

As a character, Dazzler was created to exist squarely in the Marvel Universe, with guest stars galore from other Marvel series, crowding almost every issue of the Dazzler comic. In reality, Dazzler has mostly been on the fringes of the Marvel Universe. While Marvel heroes appear regularly in the *Dazzler* comic, Dazzler has guested in very few other Marvel titles. The majority of Dazzler's appearances occurred just before and around the time that the Dazzler series first went on sale. Dazzler's only other appearances since that time have been in a pair of *Avengers* issues written by Jim Shooter (#211 and #221) and *Marvel Super Hero Contest of Champions* (which featured every hero in the Marvel Universe).

Guest stars in the *Dazzler* have rarely been portrayed in the same light as they are in their regular comics. Its like reading about a parallel world where big name world savers like the Avengers and the Fantastic Four can slobber over a disco singer like a pack of super-powered groupies. It's embarrassing to see a majestic character like Asgard's Odin wiping tears from his eyes after Dazzler has finished belting out a cosmic ballad. The Angel, a former X-Man, has probably fared the worst out of all the heroes to be disgraced by an appearance in the *Dazzler* comic. He was portrayed as a terminal bore with the hots so bad for Dazzler that he buys a restaurant she was eating at just so he could serve her as a waiter. To top things off, Angel plays a winged voyeur, following her home and waiting outside her apartment window until she finishes her date of the evening and then flies in the window.

## Origin of the Dazzler

Dazzler's origin is shown in a flashback in the first issue of her own comic. Dazzler had always wanted to be a singer as far back as she could remember. Her father, Judge Carter Blaire, disapproved of her desire to become an entertainer, telling her, "Your studies come first! If you want to attend a better law school, you must start working now ... while you're still in junior high!" The one comfort that little Alison had during this period of her life was Bella Blaire, her grandmother, who lived with the father and daughter. Bella was the one person who could smooth over Carter's stern judgments.

Bella Blaire gave Alison permission to attend the Gardendale High Spring Spectacular dance and talent contest in which Dazzler wanted to participate. Carter had forbidden Alison to attend the dance, but Bella promised to square things with him. Alison was bursting with energy at the prospect of singing solo in front of an audience at the school dance. "I've sung at parties and glee club ... but tonight's my chance to really prove myself!" That excitement carried her performance to a height she had never experienced before: "This is the moment I've been waiting for ... the moment I've always wanted! The school's sound system is providing me with taped music! I've got to cut loose like never before—!" Cutting loose was exactly what Alison did, with her latent mutant abilities displaying themselves for the first time in her life, creating an incredible kinetic light show.

Alison's song of joy was interrupted by the Blazing Lords, a street gang that barged into the school auditorium, smashing everyone and everything that got in their way as they wrecked the festivities. When one of the brutes picked Alison as his target, Alison tapped into her long dormant mutant abilities and unleashed a burst of radiance that rendered everyone in the auditorium unconscious. The light burst was blamed on a freak equipment power overload by the authorities. Alison, however, knew that she had emitted the light burst that left everybody temporarily blinded. "I don't know what I did—or how I did it—but I must never use such power again—never. Ever!"

## Early Appearances

Dazzler did use her mutant powers again in spite of the vow.

Dazzler made her nightclub debut in a very sleazy New York night club in *X-Men* #130. Once more her performance was interrupted, this time by Hellfire Club mercenaries dressed in battle armor. The mercenaries were trying to capture Phoenix and Cyclops, who had entered the club in their civvies to find a mutant—who turned out to be Dazzler. Even though Dazzler was not the target of

the Hellfire Club's attack, she was angry that her performance was ruined and addressed one of the mercenaries, "Chuckles, I had one dynamite debut goin', till you jokers crashed the gate. Now it's ruined. And for that, sucker, you gonna pay!" The mercenary paid with a multitude of light bursts flooding his eyes and his mind, overloading his brain until unconsciousness rescued him from the visual assault. Dazzler was surprised by the results of her attack. "He's catatonic! I . . . I didn't mean to dazzle him so hard—I've never intentionally used my powers to hurt anyone before."

Dazzler stuck with the X-Men while they tried to free their captured comrades in Chicago held by the White Queen. Dazzler tended to remain in the background of *X-Men* #131, with the X-Men taking care of most of the action. When the battle with the Hellfire Club was over, Prof. X offered Dazzler membership in the X-Men, to which Dazzler responded, "I appreciate the offer, Prof.—but world savin' ain't my style. I prefer the excitement I get on the stage, singin' my heart out to an audience that really digs me." Cyclops expressed concern to Prof. X that Dazzler had seen the X-Men in and out of costume and Xavier comforted him. "I did a peripheral mind-scan of her, Scott. Dazzler can be trusted."

Dazzler's appearances in *The X-Men* took place while Marvel was still trying to arrange a media tie-in event with Casablanca Records and, while Dazzler's powers were pretty much consistent with the way she uses them today, her personality was still in flux. The Dazzler that appeared in this issue is far more street-wise than the native character that appears in *Dazzler* #1. When Dazzler first talked to Cyclops, in #130, she asked him, "Hey, hunk—you Avengers or somethin'? You mind cluein' me in on what's going down here?" That was not exactly the kind of vernacular that a Magna Cum Laude college graduate would be spouting.

Dazzler appeared only a few months later in the *Amazing Spider-Man* #203, where she became integrally involved with the return of the villain Lightmaster from the light dimension by providing him with a focal point from which he was able to return to Earth. Spider-Man's interference sent Lightmaster back to the light dimension, but the destruction of Lightmaster's apparatus somehow allowed the villain to maintain control over Dazzler's body, whose powers he used to try and destroy Spider-Man. Like any good superhero, Spider-Man managed to reverse the process and return Dazzler to complete control over herself.

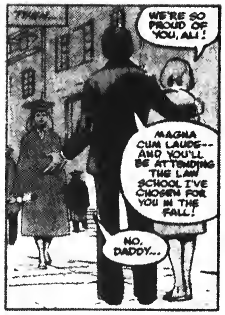
In spite of Dazzler's powers being fairly well-defined in her X-Men appearances, Dazzler used her powers in the Spider-Man stories in fashions that haven't been used since. She fired energy bursts from her hands and lasers from her eyes. She had the capability to make a flying carpet out of light energy, allowing her to fly through the air. Dazzler additionally focused her powers through her mirrored necklace to send out a blast of energy. Tom DeFalco explained in *Comics Feature* #7 that, when Marv Wolfman wanted specifics on Dazzler's powers for the Spider-Man story, DeFalco had replied, "I had gotten three different power suggestions from Casablanca. I had to tell Marv, 'Marv, I can't tell you!' I told him what the three powers were . . ."

Dazzler's next appearance was a 3-page cameo in *Fantastic Four* #217. In truth, the FF issues came out after Dazzler #1, but the events occurred before that issue. The Human Torch decided to have a night out dancing at New York's Studio Infinity, where he met Dazzler for the first time. The Torch chased a masher away from Dazzler and the two hit it off pretty well until a Fantastic Four emergency flare interrupted their festivities. The Torch had to break up their date to respond to the emergency.

## Her Own Comic—At Last

Dazzler finally appeared in her own comic, cover dated March 1981. It had been so long since John Romita, Jr. originally drew the issue that some pages had to be redrawn. Cyclops was no longer in the X-Men and had to be drawn out of the issue. Bob Larkin contributed the cover painting for this first issue.

The issue started with Dazzler being chased by a group of thugs who acted as the strong-arm negotiating team for a posh disco's underworld owner. Dazzler was able to fight off the thugs with her light powers, powered by the portable radio that she carried, but was left in a dire predicament when a stray bullet destroyed the radio, leaving her helpless without the sound necessary for her to turn into light energy. The light show she had used to fend off her attackers was of sufficient strength to attract the attention of Spider-Man, who was patrolling nearby. Spider-Man made short work of the thugs and left them wrapped in webbing hanging from a light pole for the police.



For the first time, a peek was given into Dazzler's off-stage life, and it wasn't as glamorous as her on-stage life. She was two months behind in her rent and only had half a cantaloupe and a box of Ritz crackers to munch on for supper. Things were bad enough that Dazzler was almost ready to take up the X-Men's offer to join their group, but she backed out before making a commitment, not yet ready to give up her dream to be a singer.

A conflict was introduced between Dazzler and her father, Judge Carter Blaire. Carter Blaire was portrayed as a man of iron will that was just to the right of Adolph Hitler. Carter wanted Alison to enter a law career, something that Dazzler tried to accommodate him with. Alison entered a prestigious pre-law program and graduated Magna Cum Laude in spite of dividing her time between her studies and singing in various bands. Alison made a decision at her graduation that she had to follow her own dream, not that of her father. It was a decision that angered Carter Blaire, a decision that kept father and daughter separated for two years.

The plot, which continued into *Dazzler* #2, concerned the Enchantress' manipulations that led to her becoming the lead singer at the Club Uno, a glitzy disco parlor. A momentous mystic event was about to take place and, as the Enchantress described it, "The *Cosmic Axis* is about to shift! Soon there shall occur a rift in the very fabric of reality, an opening into dimensions dark and dread! Awesome, unspeakable energies will be released when that portal doth open! Power enough for me to lay claim to this entire universe!" The place where that event would take place was on the stage at the Club Uno, thus establishing the need for the Enchantress to be on the stage at a specific point in time. To that end, the Enchantress used a spell to cause the club's featured singer to become ill.

Dazzler was made aware of the opening at the Club Uno when the Beast, of Avengers fame at the time, jumped into her apartment with a newspaper ad advertising for a new singer. She auditioned in front of the club's manager, Mr. Wildfire, and beat the Enchantress out of the job.

*Dazzler* #2, like the first issue, was expanded in size and incorporated additional pages of artwork. That additional artwork was drawn by Walt Simonson, who went uncredited for the art he did on pages 3, 12, 14, and 15.

Dazzler's premiere big-time performance was attended by a variety of super-heroes, including the X-Men, the Fantastic Four, the Avengers, and Spider-Man. The assemblage of that many heroes to hear the performance of a virtually unknown disco singer was rather uncharacteristic of them, particularly when some had, in the past, professed a preference for other than disco music (Captain America is a country & western fan).

However, the heroes did tend to come in handy to help Dazzler in her fight with the Enchantress and the sorceress' warriors. While the multitude of heroes battled the Enchantress' warriors, Dazzler squared off with the Enchantress, who had been patiently awaiting the dimensional rift. The rift occurred and a demon was about to come forth with the gift, which the Enchantress desired to possess, when Dazzler foiled her plans by using bright lights to drive back the demon into its dark dimension. The Enchantress departed, taking her warriors with her. "Only *fools* continue to battle after the prize has been forfeited!" She leaves Dazzler with a threat, "Thy perfidy hath cost me a universe! A grim and terrible vengeance awaits thee! Let anticipation add to thy misery!"

All these events left Dazzler frazzled. She wondered who would dare hire her with the death threat of an Asgardian goddess hanging over her head. Luck befell her in the person of Joseph R. Ercoli, a music publisher who was a good friend of Harry S. Osgood, a major talent agent. Osgood normally wouldn't have auditioned an unknown singer that barged into his office, but Dazzler was accompanied by the

gang of super-heroes that had attended her concert and Osgood found discretion the better part of valor. Dazzler sang her heart out for Osgood and the agent immediately signed her up as a client.

*X-Men* #148 probably took place after *Dazzler* #2, as Dazzler was still singing at the Infinity nightclub, the same club she sang at in *Fantastic Four* #217. Storm was Dazzler's invited guest at the club and brought Jessica Drew (Spider-Woman), Kitty Pryde, and Stevie Hunter with her to enjoy the show. The performance was interrupted (as were most of Dazzler's early concerts) by Caliban, a dark and lonely mutant outcast, who sought to take Kitty into his sewer home for companionship. Storm and Spider-Woman prevented that from happening. Dazzler had no participation in the battle that time. Her actions were confined to calming the panicked audience with soothing light effects.

## Doom and Dazzler

*Dazzler* #3-4 pitted the heroine against Dr. Doom and Nightmare, which could almost be forgiven as an excuse to contrast how Dazzler would react to a situation where she would be forced to use her powers against major villains versus how most super-heroes behave. Unfortunately, Dazzler's actions turned out not to be all that different from that of a standard hero.

Osgood managed to get Dazzler a spot at a UNICEF benefit concert at the United Nations. At the same time, the Latverian royal jewels were on display at the UN. The jewels captured the interest of Dr. Arturo Frazen, the Latverian ambassador, who sent hired thugs to steal the jewels. Dazzler stopped the robbery attempt when she noticed a backstage commotion, but found herself attacked by Dr. Doom when she tries to see if the gems were safe. Dr. Doom's interest laid in a single stone, the Merlin Stone, a magical gem which could make Doom invincible when joined with its brother stones which the first would enable Doom to locate. That was something that Dazzler could not allow to happen and she in turn attacked Dr. Doom after Doom had determined that she was no threat to his plans. Dazzler was easily defeated by Doom, who decided that she fitted the bill as in inconsequential pawn that could be used to brave the extradimensinal trip necessary to retrieve the Merlin Stone.

Dazzler was able to wrest the stone from Nightmare by subjecting him to light bursts that proved painful to eyes accustomed to darkness. When Dazzler returned to Earth, she found herself infuriated that Dr. Doom used her against her will to obtain the Merlin Stone. She used a laser blast to destroy the stones and even turned her power against Dr. Doom. A power blast from Doom brought the ceiling down on Dazzler, knocking her out. Doom pondered killing the upstart, but preferred to retreat upon seeing the Human Torch nearby, not wanting to confront the Fantastic Four at that time.

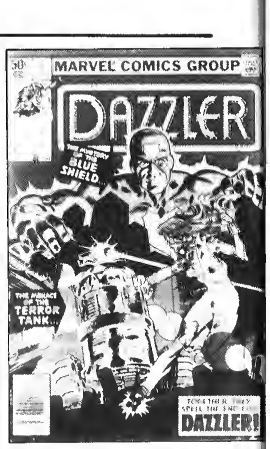
## The Dazzler Band

A few more characters were added to the Dazzler series in #3. Lancelot Steele was brought in as Osgood's top road manager. Lance was a bodybuilder in love with himself, but startled Dazzler by quoting classical poetry. Osgood's personal secretary, Cassandra Ferlenghetti, had been introduced in #2 as a snippy woman who had no fondness for Dazzler. A romantic lead for Dazzler, Dr. Paul Janson, stepped into the series in #5 as the doctor who treated her for injuries she sustained in her battle with Dr. Doom. Janson proved to be a bit stuffy, but Dazzler loved him anyway.

*Dazzler* #5 also created the first, and only, new super-hero in the series, the Blue Shield. Dazzler helped reunite the Blue Shield with his ailing mother. While the Blue Shield has not appeared outside of the Dazzler series in anything consequential, the character does have an interesting premise. The Blue Shield fights crime syndicates at night while his alter-ego, Joey Cartelli, is a valuable mob figure to the gangster his father died for.

Dazzler next became a guest-star in *Marvel Team-Up* #108-109, where she helped Spider-Man and Paladin defeat the villain, Thermo. She was still doing charity work for Osgood when a fight in the alley behind the singing hall attracted her attention. Thermo was in the process of siphoning off Spider-Man's life energy until Dazzler rescued the hapless hero. She was later kidnapped by satanists that delivered her to Thermo for punishment in her interference with Thermo's actions. Spider-Man and Paladin rescued Dazzler, allowing the spunky heroine to get in a few good licks. The effectiveness of Dazzler's powers so impressed the Paladin, that Dazzler thought, "Even if I don't make a career of this hero shtick, it's good to get taken seriously."

*Avengers* #211 probably marked Dazzler's next appearance. She was one of the many super-heroes that Moondragon gathered as being potential members in a new Avengers line-up. Dazzler was dismissed when Moondragon realized that Dazzler




was more interested in being a singer than a heroine, but did warn her that her powers were far greater than she ever imagined.

The Hulk became Dazzler's opponent in #6-7. Harry S. Osgood finally gets Dazzler a paying performance, as a country and western act, as well as setting Dazzler up with a new back-up band, consisting of Beefer, Hunch, and Marx. Tom DeFalco missed the boat on these issues by having Dazzler react to the Hulk as everyone else does, by attacking him, instead of making any attempt to reason with the brute. In the end, that is the tactic that Dazzler took, but it was far too late. Those actions tended to undermine the position that Dazzler was a singer and not a world-saver.

## Mutant Paranoia

*Dazzler* #6 also introduced a mutant paranoia background to the series that was portrayed with an even heavier hand than in the *X-Men* title. Dazzler's musical identity again took a back seat to her problems as a mutant. She had used her powers to rescue an old man who was being mugged by a group of toughs. Instead of being thanked, Dazzler was attacked by the crowd that saw her save the man. She managed to escape without injury, but it was her first taste of prejudice.

Eventually Dazzler was coerced into entering Project Pegasus, a research organization studying energy alternatives, one of which is the study of super-powered beings with energy-related powers. Dazzler found herself enamored with Project Pegasus' chief of security, the hero, Quasar. The rest of the project staff examined her as if she were some kind of human guinea pig. That distrust led to Dazzler freeing Klaw, the murderous master of sound, when it appeared that Pegasus scientists were injuring him. Dazzler quickly found herself battling Klaw to stop him from killing Quasar.

Klaw turned his sonic energies against Dazzler. Dazzler had never shown any ability to control her sound absorption ability in the past, and so found herself incapable of turning it off when Klaw found his sonic energies being absorbed into the heroine. Neither were capable of halting the process. Klaw's full sonic life force was absorbed by Dazzler, leaving only a metallic hand that clattered on the floor after everything was over. Dazzler considered herself a murderer!

Dazzler's subsequent powerful escape from Pegasus attracted the attention of Galactus, who recruited her to bring Terrax the Terrible, his herald, back from a black hole that Terrax fled to in his escape from his master. Thanks to a soul-stirring speech by Dazzler, Galactus forgave Terrax of any wrongdoing and reinstated him as his herald. Dazzler was returned to Earth. A young ambitious lawyer, Ken Barnett, was introduced as a new romantic interest to make up for the void left when Dr. Janson dumped Dazzler in a fancy restaurant.

The Blue Shield made a brief second appearance in *Dazzler* #14. Lance Steele was mistaken by a group of thugs for the Blue Shield who tried to have a brainwashed She-Hulk kill him. Dazzler came to Lance's rescue and snapped the She-Hulk out of her mind control for a happy ending. The services of Jessica Drew (Spider-Woman) were enlisted in #15 by Dazzler to solve the mystery of a truck that carried a sign identical to a brooch that Dazzler's long lost mother once wore. The two objects eventually turned out to be unrelated. The truck serviced an abandoned S.H.I.E.L.D. training facility that Dazzler and Spider-Woman had to eventually fight their way out of after they accidentially activated it.

Dazzler's west coast tour (#14-16) was cut short when the lead act, Bruce Harris, fired her for upstaging his act. The Enchantress chose to kidnap Dazzler from a cross-country jet to exact her revenge upon the singer that meddled in her affairs way back in issue #1. This act of taking a mortal eventually reached Odin's attention and Dazzler and the Enchantress were given the chance to settle their differences first by combat, and then by song. Dazzler won the singing contest, winning Odin's external gratitude.

A pair of guest spots occurred next, first in *Avengers* #221, where Dazzler was once more approached to become an Avenger, this time by the Wasp who wanted to add a female to their ranks. Dazzler wasn't interested, but got the chance to battle the comic Mechano-Marauder with the other heroines that Wasp had invited to an informal party. Dazzler was yanked from a club to be in the *Marvel Super Hero Contest of Champions* as were all of Marvel's heroes, but played no part in the contest.

## Fallen Angel

The Angel fell uncharacteristically head-over-heels in love with Dazzler in issue #17. Angel pursued Dazzler like an absolute bore, trying to impress her by showing his photo on the cover of *Fortune* magazine (which he apparently keeps with him just for such occasions), chased her onto a bus where he tried to pay the fare with a hundred dollar bill, and then took off his clothes to show her his wings. The Angel tried to explain his sudden infatuation to Dazzler. "Well, months ago . . . we met each other casually at the Numero Uno Club . . . and later when Moondragon compelled you and me—among others—to try out for the *Avengers*. Though we hardly talked those times, I sensed something special about you. A couple of months later, having split in a huff from the X-Men, I found myself layed up after a battle with the Ghost Rider. I had lots of time to think, maybe too much. I began reevaluating my whole life . . . that included my long-time relationship with Candy Southern. I'd been with her so long, I forgot there were other women in the world. That's when I started thinking about you. You fascinated me."

Dazzler politely told him to buzz off. The Angel, however, was not to be easily deterred. After all, he did sense something special in her. That was when Angel decided to buy a restaurant just so he could wait on her. Dazzler told him off one more time and stormed out of the restaurant.

Not one to take a hint, Angel followed Dazzler and her date, Ken Barnett, home and patiently flapped his wings outside Dazzler's window until Ken left. He then immediately seized the opportunity to be alone with Dazzler and forcibly pulled Dazzler from her room and gave her an aerial tour of New York City in a scence obviously ripped off from the Superman movie.

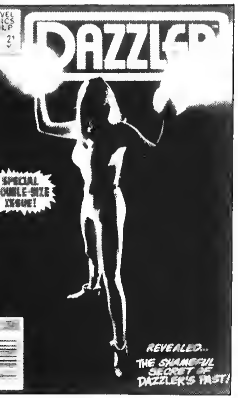
Angel turned out to be lucky in his third attempt, completely turning Dazzler around so that she became totally infatuated with him.

Dazzler defeated the Absorbing Man in issues #18-19 with the help of Black Bolt's devastating sonic voice. Judge Carter Blaire went nuts in #18, presumably because of the incredible angst he suffered by having allowed his rift with Dazzler to widen too far.

Doctor Sax and Johnny Guitar made their first appearance in *Dazzler* #20. The villains were given their powers by Techmaster, for reasons unspecified, and tried to

settle a score with Dazzler's backup band for preventing them from completing a robbery. Dazzler easily defeated them.

*Dazzler* #21 was a special double-sized issue where the "dreaded dark secrets of Dazzler's past" were revealed. In truth, it wasn't so much Dazzler's past that was revealed as it was her mother's. The series had dropped hints for years that there was some shameful explanation as to why Dazzler's mother was absent so long from the series. The revelation of the secret turned out not to be worth the wait as the shameful secret turned out to be a relatively tame soap opera problem.




The Sisterhood of Evil Mutants attempted to capture Angel in *Dazzler* #22 with a plan to force him to reveal secrets about the X-Men. Dazzler had to rescue him and made herself an enemy of the Sisterhood. A second-rate villain, Flame, a costumed arsonist for hire, was introduced in *Dazzler* #23 and Dazzler mistook his actions against her as the work of the Sisterhood and hired Power Man and Iron Fist as bodyguards. Dazzler's snooping placed her in a bad situation with Flame, but she was able to defeat him before the Heroes for Hire arrived on the scene. The Heroes fared a little better in the next issue and captured Rogue before she could get even with Dazzler. Unfortunately, Dazzler's sympathy for Rogue gave the villainess a chance to escape.

In one of the few stories that leaned heavily on Dazzler's show business backdrop, *Dazzler* #25 had Dazzler facing a psychotic fan that loved her. That fan was willing to murder people that got between him and his love, until Dazzler was forced to put an end to his violent actions. Lois London, Dazzler's half-sister, was revealed to be a mutant in *Dazzler* #26, when her powers manifested themselves as she tried to fend off an attacker. Those powers drained the life from the man, killing him. The incident panicked the sisters and they fled to the west coast, not sure what they should do about what happened, afraid to go to the authorities. They were confronted by a mysterious blackmailer when they reached their destination. The blackmailer somehow obtained photos of Lois's unintentional murder and wanted the sisters to kill a man or he would have the photos published. The sisters played along with his demands, and with the help of the Angel, captured the blackmailer, in *Dazzler* #27. The intended murder victim turned out to be Nick Brown, Lois's father. Rogue made a return appearance, in #28, and Dazzler defeated her once more, this time soundly enough that Rogue was not expected to attack her again. The villainess has since joined the X-Men.

## Namor Hoboken?

Roman Nekoboh (a not-very-hard-to-crack anagram) was introduced in *Dazzler* #29 as an aging former singing idol whose flamboyant style far outstripped his zero income. Exit Lois London and Nick Brown after *Dazzler* had an argument with Brown over how he was trying to manage her career. Events in the series became chaotic over the next dozen issues as a plethora of writers brought in new characters and subplots while dropping and ignoring the old. The Dazzler series had already been demoted to a bi-monthly, with #26, the reason given by Jim Shooter as being, "so that we can do a better job on it." (see *The Comics Journal* #77).

Marvel's Assistant Editor's Month took over *Dazzler* #30 where a quasi-military organization tried out a new weapon on Dazzler. The weapon was built to cause a mutant's powers to go out of control, to make them appear to be menaces. The plan backfired when one of the group's own members turned out to be a latent mutant that turned into a giant berserk lizard that Dazzler had to stop, and did. *Dazzler* #31 was a character study about a stunt man willing to face the elemental power of a tidal wave rather than see the home he put his life into swept away. He was willing to die in it rather than start anew. Dazzler used her laser powers to blunt the tidal wave, saving both house and man.

The Inhumans needed Dazzler's help, in #32, to stop a wave of darkness approaching their home on the moon, caused by Blackstar and Moonstone. A new supporting cast was added to the series this issue, Mr. Witwicky, Dazzler's new employer at the Los Angeles Health and Racquet Club, and Janet McEntee, her new girlfriend. The job at the Health and Racquet Club only lasted a few issues. Dazzler exposed a movie director, in #33, that was willing to kill her for a publicity stunt. She briefly became one of Millie's Models the next issue (Millie being the former star of an old Marvel romance book) in a plot about a hack fashion designer that kidnapped models to display his new fashion line.

## Graphic Dazzler

*Marvel Graphic Novel* #12 came next and had to be the most extravagant waste of the graphic novel format to date. It was advertised as being a book that "will affect every living mutant . . . forever," under the hope that a tie-in with the popular X-Men would sell additional copies. The major event that occurred in the book that would supposedly affect every mutant in Earth was the public revelation that Dazzler was a mutant. Exactly how that revelation would affect all other mutants was more than a little puzzling. In the end, the mutant scare story done in the graphic novel was only a pale imitation of what had already been done in *The X-Men* and would only tend to have an effect on Dazzler's personal life.





The *Dazzler Graphic Novel* portrayed Dazzler's rise to stardom on the coattails of Roman Nekoboh, whose fame rubbed off on her when she was with him, making headlines in all the scandal papers. A publicity stunt for Dazzler's upcoming movie role laid bare the fact that she was a mutant in front of the whole televised world, touching off a wave of anti-mutant hysteria. Dazzler, as always, proved to be to spunky and managed to overcome this new problem.

The effect of the graphic novel on the Dazzler series was shown in issue #35, where Dazzler found it all but impossible to get any kind of job, singing or otherwise. She finally found a job as a waitress at the Femmes Club, which catered exclusively to women. This somewhat surprisingly marked the first pedestrian job that Dazzler had to stoop to, with her only previous non-singing job being one as a glorified aerobics instructor at the Los Angeles Health and Racquet Club in *Dazzler* #31. The job didn't last very long because she quit after having a run-in with the Racine Ramjets, a female roller derby team.

Dazzler next swung a job as a canteen singer at a slick nightclub, Reilly's Ace of Clubs, in *Dazzler* #36. There, the Tatterdemalion tried to scare her out of the job, as he had done singers before her. As it turned out, the Tatterdemalion had been half of a semi-famous singing/dancing team and was scaring away the singers at the club because he wanted his former partner, who worked at the club, to have a chance to become a star once more. While the story had a few interesting moments, it wound up trivializing one of Marvel's more mysterious villains by giving him a soap opera origin.

*Dazzler* #37 continued the trend that Jim Shooter started when he wrote #35, that of making Dazzler an observer in her series and concentrate on the other characters in the story. It's a shame that the bulk of the charaterization in these stories was being wasted on casts of throw-away characters instead of trying to build up Dazzler as a person. This particular issue was basically an upgraded haunted house story, where the ghost was a girl hooked up to a computer where holograms replaced apparitions. This issue also marked the demise of Revenge, Inc., the group behind Tom Devine's power in #34, but there's no sense of loss in the off-handed way that the organization was so quickly dismissed without having been used to any extent.

## The Beauty and the Beast

Next came the *Beauty and the Beast* mini-series. Ann Nocenti, the current editor of the *X-Men* and the *New Mutants* series, wrote the four-issue mini-series. It concerns Dazzler's tribulations as a performer in a mutant gladiatorial ring. She found herself enjoying the thrill and acceptance she received performing there. Her friendships with her fellow mutant gladiators seemed more precious than any she had ever had before. The Beast became caught up in the Dazzler's troubles and fell in love with her. Together, with the help of some new mutant friends, the Beast and the Dazzler triumphed over the coliseum ringleader, Alexander Flynn, and walked away into the sunset.

The mini-series was a little better than the regular *Dazzler* series, but that isn't meant as much of a compliment. The idea of a mutant gladiatorial ring on the scale in which it was depicted in the mini-series was more than a little outrageous. Additionally, Dr. Doom was thrown into the mini-series and had absolutely nothing to do. Alexander Flynn was depicted as Dr. Doom's long lost son, something that had never even been hinted at in all of Doom's previous appearances. Doom traveled all the way to America to witness the mutants overthrow Flynn and just walked away without ever becoming involved. It's unlikely that Flynn's connection with Dr. Doom will ever be mentioned in the future because the good doctor comes mainly under the purview of whomever writes the Fantastic Four and such a son would fly in the face of everything that has happened in that title.

The mutant gladiator ring popped up once more in New Mutants #29. Two of the New Mutants, Sunspot and Magma, were kidnapped and forced to participate in the gladiatorial sport. Their teammates, Cannonball and Magik, set out to rescue them and, seeking the help of the only person they knew in California, Lila Cheney (also a mutant), also found help in the form of the Dazzler. Dazzler was performing as a session singer for Cheney and

helped supply the New Mutants with the information they needed to rescue their comrades.

Unfortunately, the attempt to rescue the gladiator ring captives was interrupted by Magneto. The Beyonder was on Earth and Magneto needed all the power he could muster to confront the omnipotent being. The Beyonder granted a TV writer the power to become anything he wanted and he chose the form of one of his cartoon characters, Thundersword (which was a thinly disguised satire on Steve Gerber and his *Thundarr* Saturday morning cartoon character). Thundersword's rampage made the heroes mistake him for the Beyonder and Dazzler battled him alongside the X-Men, New Mutants, Captain America, and Iron Man. There were too many characters for Dazzler to do much of anything and her usefulness was limited to a dazzle burst that caught Thundersword off guard.

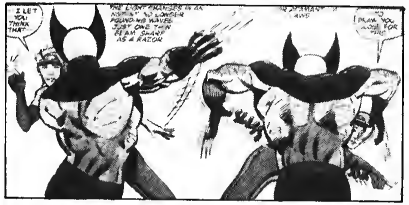
Dazzler and the New Mutants returned to rescuing Sunspot and Magma in *New Mutants* #30-31. Dazzler defied the New Mutants' wishes and infiltrated the gladiator camp where she once more fell under the spell that had earlier trapped her there as old friendships renewed themselves and Dazzler was able to sing before crowds once more. Somehow, Dazzler found the strength within her to resist the easy fame before her, recognizing that she could never truly be one of the gladiators. The New Mutants rescue their teammates and drive away the gladiator ringleader.

## Last Dance

The best news for the Dazzler series was the advent of Archie Goodwin coming on the scene as Dazzler's new regular writer. One of the comic industry's most respected writers, Goodwin represented the series' best hope for survival which, in the long run, was an effort in vain as the comic was cancelled less than a year after Archie started writing it. Goodwin described his reasons for taking on the Dazzler assignment in *Comics Feature* #35: "I needed some work and no one else wanted to do it, I think," and continued, "In *Dazzler*, we're trying to make a definitive change, in that up to now she's been a little more on the soap opera side. I'm going to try to reemphasize a little more action and heroics.

"I don't like to come in on a series and immediately start wiping out other characters or anything like that. Probably what'll happen is, I'll spend more time developing new characters, and eventually as I go along there may be some older characters that I'd like to bring back. In the first issue she'll have guest stars that will establish her need to become a super hero. And from there we'll gradually build her own storylines." (*Marvel Age* #28).

The guest stars Goodwin was talking about, above, were the X-Men in Dazzler #38. Dazzler sought their help to further develop her super powers. The reasons for Dazzler to develop her powers were explained by Nightcrawler on page 12, "She's asked to train with us—*rehone* her powers—to use them *positively* and help undo the recent anti-mutant hysteria." The intent of that explanation, while not overly clear, was that Dazzler was going to become a super-heroine and use her powers to help others instead of just as a show biz gimmick. Wolverine gave her a hard time during her training stint with the X-Men. Dazzler, confident with the new degree of control she now had with her powers, challenged Wolverine to a test where she had to essentially survive a game of roughhouse tag in San Diego against Wolverine and Colossus. She managed to hold her own against the two, but the exercise eventually went out of control when Wolverine decided to take it to a more dangerous extreme, angered by Dazzler's successes. The match was called off when Cyclops broke it up, not interested in seeing anybody get hurt.




Dazzler #38 was no great classic. In fact, it's a rather clumsy tale, tossing aside logic to make the single point that Dazzler has become a super hero instead of remaining a singer. Colossus and Wolverine smash windows, doors, and a hotel swimming pool in the process of playing the game. That was way above and beyond what could be reasonably expected and represents a sacrifice of plot to visuals. That type of activity is out of character for Colossus and even for Wolverine, who has become a thinking hero instead of as an instinctive animal. A city shouldn't be torn up for some silly exercise. Still, it's a smidgen better than having Dazzler fight the X-Men over some hackneyed case of mistaken identity. The issue managed to stay way over the previous issues—less a statement of how good #38 is than how bad the previous 37 issues were. One of the nice things about the issue was the introduction of O.Z. Chase, a bounty hunter with an ornery cigar-chomping dog by the name of Cerberus. O.Z. added a lot to the otherwise bland Dazzler supporting cast.

Dazzler was attacked by a scientist, Deathgrip, whose daughter was left in a catatonic state by the lightshow that Dazzler had given in the graphic novel, in Dazzler #39. Deathgrip blamed Dazzler for the incident, refusing to believe the doctors who told him that his daughter's state was due to the drugs she took, and wanted to kill Dazzler in the sick belief that her death would awaken his daughter from her trance. Dazzler failed to avoid Deathgrip's attack and reasoning with the man proved futile. She had to dazzle him with a burst of light energy. The light stimulation left him catatonic, but somehow brought Deathgrip's daughter out of her trance. There was little time for Dazzler to reflect on her victory because O.Z. Chase was waiting for her in her motel room, placing her under arrest.

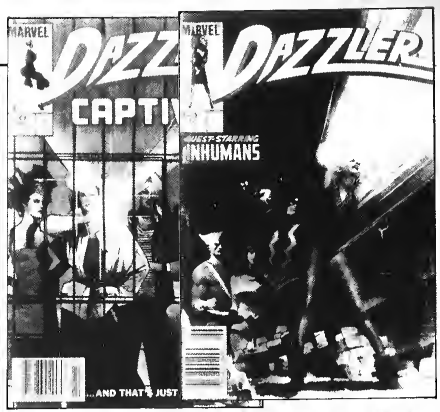
## The Beyonder and Beyond

Dazzler crossed over into *Secret Wars II* as the one woman who the Beyonder decided to test the mysteries of love with. Dazzler disappeared from O.Z. Chase's pick-up truck to appear before the Beyonder. The Beyonder showered her with every crazy trick he could think of to impress her, transporting her with him around the globe and around the universe. This was in spite of the Beyonder's great care to choose a woman whose love cannot be bought—the first thing he tried to do was buy it. He even went to the extent of granting her half of his cosmic power, but she still rejected him. For an instant, the Beyonder toyed with using his powers to make her love him, having himself fallen in love with her. Using his power in such a fashion left the Beyonder with a puppet who would do anything he wanted, but such an action left him unsatisfied and he returned her willpower to her.

Dazzler was returned to O.Z.'s pick-up in Dazzler #40. She and O.Z. ran across a group of punk bikers with tekekinetic powers. They wanted to ostensibly free her from O.Z., but react violently when she refused to come with them. The more Dazzler used her powers against them, bolstered by the Beyonder who had tagged along as part of her and later beside her, the more powerful the bikers became. Dazzler and the Beyonder had to cease using their powers to finally defeat the bikers, who collapsed without the energies they were using to increase their powers.

Dazzler #41 was an issue of revelations. It is clear with this issue that Archie Goodwin knew that the comic was to soon be cancelled as he made every effort in this, and the next issue, to wrap up all the plot threads that he had started to unravel in the previous few issues. The bikers that Dazzler fought in the previous issue were part of a coven of youths who were the offspring of the experimental victims of a drug program designed to create super powered beings. The original experimental subjects did not respond to the treatment, but the power was dormant in their children until a chance exposure to Dazzler's energies awakened their powers. The scientists hired O.Z. Chase to bring Dazzler to them, but Chase was unaware of their intentions. Dust, the lead scientist, required the bodies of others for his continued survival and transferred his consciousness into Judge Carter Blaire's body. He was unable to fool Dazzler for long in the familiar guise of her father. He tried to take over the Dazzler's body as her father's body began to crumble under Dust's advanced disease. O.Z. prevented Dust from taking Dazzler's life by shooting at Dust's crumbling body.

Another member of Dazzler's family, her mother, was held captive at Camp Silence by Dust's wife, Silence. The survival of Dazzler's mother was dependent upon Dazzler exhausting her light energies before a throng of Silence's latent psychic charges, awakening their powers. Dazzler was rescued by the Beast and O.Z., destroying Camp Silence in the process. One of Camp Silence's latent prodigies, Arthur Allen Smith, provided a cover for Dazzler by convincing the world that she died in the battle. With Dazzler's apparent 'death,' it leaves room for anyone who wants to revive the character to start with a clean slate. The ending to the issue wasn't entirely satisfying because the comic had started out with the statement that Dazzler was dead, one of the most promising angles to ever be proposed in the title, and it was a bit disappointing to learn that it was a lie and Dazzler managed to walk into the sunset once more with the Beast. Yet, the trick beginning is actually a result of Smith's power to alter the way in which events are perceived and it sort of made the whole thing work out okay in the end.




## Summing Up

That's it. The end of the Dazzler. The story left off with the open ended proposition that the Dazzler could be made part of the X-Factor team and there is a strong chance that such an event will take place because Mike Carlin is the editor of both series. Dazzler's last issue went out in style with a cover blurb stating, "Because you demanded it—the last issue of the Dazzler!" It's a nice touch of wry humor and represents one of the few honest cancellations of a series. Usually, a cancellation is preceded by a stereotypical statement that the comic was not cancelled due to bad sales, but was dropped to make room for more wonderful new comics. The Dazzler series was cancelled because it wasn't selling and it's nice to not have anyone lie about it this time around. With Dazzler's cancellation, Mike Carlin has probably established some kind of record by writing and editing three comic book series that have all been cancelled within months of each other: the aforementioned Dazzler, *Rom*, and *The Thing*. Rumors have been flying that even the venerable *Captain America*, edited by Mike Carlin, may be cancelled as Mike rushes headlong to top his current record.*

Archie Goodwin's Dazzler issues were the only bright spot in an otherwise dismal series. In reality, his issues weren't all that spectacular. They're good, solid, well-told tales, but nothing to write home about. They don't stick up out of the masses of comics like, say, *Swamp Thing*, but at least didn't sink down to the bottom as previous issues had. Goodwin knows how to write comics and immediately corrected a lot of the series' most glaring flaws. He wisely took most of Dazzler's dialogue away from her and gave it to the other characters in the comic. He did away with Dazzler's incessant whining and let the readers experience Dazzler's problems through the minds of others. Goodwin did a few interesting things in the comic, but it was cancelled before he could stamp a definitive mark on it. Look at what he had: one issue to redefine the Dazzler character, one issue for the *Secret Wars II* cross-over, and two issues to wrap everything up. That left only one issue to really do what he wanted. There's almost the temptation to want to see what else Goodwin could do with the series, but it's luckily a temptation that passes very rapidly.

Hopefully, Dazzler's demise will not be taken in the wrong light by the publishers. It would be too easy to blame the comic's failure on the fact that it starred a woman. The series failed because it was awful. The fact that it lasted as long as it did is a testament to the fact that there is an audience out there that wants to read about female heroes, no matter how badly written. In that light, it is definitely something of an accomplishment that Dazzler lasted as long as 42 issues because there aren't all that many new comics that survive more than a year. ●

* *Rumors that have since been denied, we should point out.—FDS*

# Coming in JUNE From FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

## CAPT. JACK #3: Unreal Estate

Caught between life and death, Hor-man and Beelzebub burn around the astral plane and meet several extremely odd individuals. Meanwhile, Adam the Android ponders the implications of a robotic menage a trois between himself, Lisa, and their creator Animator MIKE KAZALEH achieves an exuberant plateau with this menagerie of decidedly different funny animals.

With its tie-in to the successful *Critters*, and the resurgence of funny-animals, this is one title that might surprise you!

***Captain Jack #3**: 32 pages, black & white with color covers. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in June. $2.00 (Canada, $2.85)*

## CRITTERS #5: Fear of Dragons

The FREDDY MILTON cover heralds the climax of the first Gruffs story. Grinchy is kidnapped and the Gruffs' house is vandalized by anti-dragon forces. Hara making his first appearance in *Critters* is STAN *Usagi Yojimbo* SAKAI's *Nilson Groundthumper*. Then, in STEVE GALLACHER's *Birthright*, the revolt against Tolau grows in violence, with Prince Allon leading the charge. With its heady mix of action, drama, and humor, this title has been our runaway hit of the year—the first two issues are already SOLD OUT! *Note: Doomsday Squad* #3 features a *Critters* tie-in!

***Critters #5**: 32 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in June. $2.00 (Canada $2.85)*

## AH PREVIEW SPECIAL #3

The massive, semi-annual table of new comics, containing all comics to be released in the second half of 1986. The scoop on the new books, new characters, who will be doing what, and where they're taking their titles. A wonderful STEPHEN DeSTEFANO *Mazing Man* cover and more info than ever before—including a "Whatever Happened To?" section on all the announced titles from last year that never materialized & why not—make this a "must-buy" item in every fan's summer comics list.

***Amazing Heroes Preview Special #3**. 148 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in June. $4.50 (Canada, $6.35).*

## LOVE AND ROCKETS #18: Hottest Book!

***Attention Dealers**: The May issue of Rolling Stone will name **Love and Rockets** the swingin'hottest comic book in America! This sort of invaluable media exposure (Rolling Stone has a circulation of close to a million) is the kind of thing that will expand the comics-reading clientele beyond comic-book fandom. So order a lot of extra copies, and you may want to go back and order some more copies of Book Two, solicited last month, as well.*

In this issue: another stranger comes to Palomar, bringing with her the shit-or-all the supernatural and causing decent folks in fear for their souls. It means a crisis of conscience for Sheriff Chelo. Meanwhile, Maggie Hupey, and the gang are still home less and at large in the city.

***Note**: "Love and Rockets" is recommended for mature readers.*

***Love and Rockets #18**. 32 pages, black & white with color covers. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in June. $2.25 (Canada $3.25)*

## THREAT #5: Playing With Dynamite

Bob Mercenary stumbles onto the munitions warehouse of the Jah-nah terrorists, just before the Buffalo Soldiers burn it with the tale of Ousland Stallin hanging in the balance. The Rush-Trails lead the Holo-Hros to the secret of the Rush-Toad temple, but Han Lu-Tsarm is close behind. In "Enigma Funnies," the hapless sheriff must learn the lesson learned by Danny Kaye in *The Kid from Brooklyn*—only more dramatically. And in "Zone," Ultra and Henry begin putting together Zone's legacy, by Alex Zen and Nuclear War.

It's cover-to-cover comics excitement from the hottest new talents in the business!

***Threat #5**. 32 pages, black & white with color covers. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in June. $2.00 (Canada, $3.25).*

## AH #98: Jim Starlin Interviewed! AH #99: Previewing New Elektra!

The all-new *Amazing Heroes* gets hotter yet, as we present the first major interview with fan fave JIM STARLIN in #98! The man who created Drax, Star and gave Captain Marvel and Warlock their final glory talks about his career in comics and the new direction for Drax-star at First Comics in this *AH* exclusive—with a new Starlin cover, natch!

*AH #99* reviews the FRANK MILLER/BILL SIENKIEWICZ *Elektra Epic* Comics series, with sneak peaks at Sienkiewicz's revolutionary artwork, and exclusive pages from his sketchbook. This issue sports a brand new Sienkiewicz Elektra cover that will knock your eyes out!

Also in both issues: Three Dimensional Comics, Don Rosa's Information Center, hero histories, news, coming comics, and much more!

***Amazing Heroes #98**. 84 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in early June. $2.5( (Canada, $3.5()*

***Amazing Heroes #99**. 84 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in late June. $2.50 (Canada, $3.5()*

## NEMO #21: King Aroo and Percy Crosby

This issue brings back a forgotten masterpiece of sophisticated surrealist nonsense, ranked by critics with *Krazy Kat* and *Pogo*: JACK KENT's *King Aroo*. We're reprinting a full story sequence from the 1950s—directly from breathtakingly sharp syndicate art proofs! Also: A portfolio of PERCY Skippy CROSBY's striking paintings of slum life, and a biography of *Toonerville Trolley*'s FONTAINE FOX by his art assistant!

***NEMO #21**. 68 pages. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in June. $3.50 (Canada $4.85)*

## Mike Baron, Steve Rude, Bill Woggon, C.C. Beck in THE COMICS JOURNAL #110

MIKE BARON, the toast of fandom for his *Nexus* and *The Badger*, is featured in an outspoken interview with a new cover by STEVE RUDE! Also in this issue, an interview with BILL (*Katy Keene*) WOGGON, another eye-opening CC BECK column, the usual stimulating news and reviews, "Funnybook Resuletta," and much more!

***The Comics Journal #110**. 100 pages. Published by The Comics Journal, Inc. Shipping in June. $2.95 (Canada, $4.25).*

## FULL-COLOR COMICS FOR THE SUMMER OF '86!

## FLESH AND BONES #1: Dalgoda Back in 4-Part Series—plus Moore!

This is the premiere issue of the first book in the new **Upshot Graphics** line—and it's a winner! JAN STRNAD and DENNIS FUJITAKE recap Dal's ex plots briefly, then launch into a new tale of action and intrigue.

And in ALAN MOORE and STEVE PARKHOUSE's hilarious *Bojoffnos Saga*, rentman Trevor Inch male confronts the inexplicable Bojoffnes. Needless to say, A collector's item—in superb full color by WHEATLEY MAYER and SMITH. ***Free Color Retail Display Poster!***

***Flesh and Bones #1**. 32 pages. Full-color comic book. Published by Fantagraphics Books Inc. Shipping June 4. $2.00 (Canada $2.95).*

## Kane! Baron! Burden! Hernandez! Toth! agree that ANYTHING GOES!

The title says it. This is what happens when the best in the business are given carte blanche and total creative freedom—in spectacular full color! On top for this very special micro-series are such creators and unusual teams as JAN (*Dalgoda*) STRNAD & GILBERT (*Love and Rockets*), HERNANDEZ and MIKE (*Nexus*) BARON & DAVE (*Pando Khan*) GARCIA. Not to mention GIL KANE's first new Savage Story (with cover!) in over 15 years, a *Mr Monster*-introduced tale of terror from MICHAEL T GILBERT, the first full-color *Fleming Carrot* story by BOB BURDEN, a page from artist's artist ALEX TOTH, and more!

Coming in the second and third issues: Exciting all-new all-original work by JAIME HERNANDEZ! FRANK MILLER! BILL SIENKIEWICZ! DAVE SIM! ALAN MOORE! DON SIMPSON! And lots more! Buy now or kick yourself later.

***Note**: Anything Goes is recommended for mature readers.*

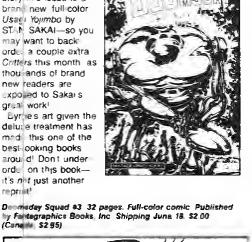
***Anything Goes #1**. 32 pages. Full-color comic book. Published by The Comics Journal Inc. Shipping June 11. $2.00 (Canada $2.85).*

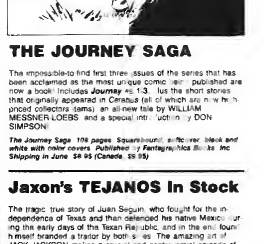
## DOOMSDAY SQUAD #3: Byrne in Full Color... Plus CRITTERS Tie-in!

Swing into summer with JOHN BYRNE's *Doomsday+1*—beautifully recolored by MARK WHEATLEY and KATHRYN MAYER with a new Byrne cover. The backup story this issue is a brand new full-color *Usagi Yojimbo* by STAN SAKAI—so you may want to back order a couple extra *Critters* this month, as thousands of brand new readers are exposed to Sakai's great work!

Byrne's art given the deluxe treatment has made this one of the best-looking books around! Don't under-order on this book—it's *not* just another reprint!

***Doomsday Squad #3**. 32 pages. Full-color comic. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping June 18. $2.00 (Canada, $2.85).*





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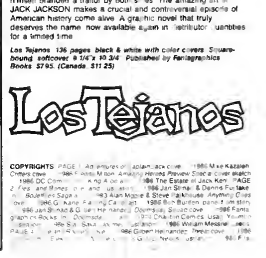


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# A Short Survey of *Intentionally* Funny Super-Heroes

By Carl Cafarelli

No matter how much you love super-heroes, you have to admit that there's something just plain ... *silly* about a fully-grown adult parading around in garish long underwear to fight for truth, justice and possession of the Cosmic Cube. The built-in absurdities of the super-hero genre have inspired countless parodies over the years. It could even be seen as a sign of the super-hero's universal recognition that such parodies have appeared in nearly all media, including movies, TV, a variety of magazines, newspaper strips, and, of course, comic books.

Most super-hero parodies have been intended as isolated one-shots, whether it was *Mad*'s "Superduperman!" or a Milton Berle TV sketch with Batman (Adam West) and The Green Hornet (Van Williams). However, there have also been many attempts to build a continuing comic-book feature around the lighter side of caped crusading. This article will take a look at some of the funny-hero features that have appeared since the early 1940s. Without further ado, *up, up and*—oh, you get the idea.

As nearly everyone reading this is surely aware, the super-hero strips at the time had a light-hearted, boyish atmosphere; even the grim Batman was noted for wisecracking his way through fisticuffs (e.g., "You may be The Joker but I'm the king of clubs!"). The whimsy of the original Captain Marvel and the outrageous sight gags of Jack Cole's Plastic Man took this a step further, and made other costumed crimefighters seem positively sedate by comparison.

The very first full-fledged super-hero parody came, fittingly, from Superman-DC, the company that had introduced the super-hero. Sheldon Mayer's *Scribbly*, a back-up strip in *All-American Comics*, concerned the comic misadventures of a kid cartoonist. In *All-American Comics* #20, Scribbly's younger brother Dinky and neighbor Sisty had been kidnapped by gangsters. With the police unable to help, a frustrated Scribbly remarked on how the Green Lantern (the star of *All-American*) would've been able to recover the missing kids in no time. Intrigued, Sisty's mother—a brawny housewife named Ma Hunkel—decided to stand in for Green Lantern and rescue the kids on her own. Donning some itchy red long underwear, a black cape and an inverted metal pot for a mask, Ma Hunkel became the mysterious Red Tornado.

The Golden Age Red Tornado.

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As The Red Tornado, Ma Hunkel quickly brought the kidnappers to justice. Although subject to gender confusion and frequently referred to as "The Red Tomato," The Red Tornado soon had all of gangland running scared. She even found time to chase down butchers who overcharged customers, and to make a one-page appearance at the first meeting of the Justice Society of America in *All-Star Comics* #3 (she might even have stayed for the rest of the meeting if she hadn't torn her pants while coming in through the window). The Red Tornado was, indeed, "all brawn and no brain" as one JSA member described her, but she was also very funny. Her origin sequence was re-printed in *A Smithsonian Book of Comic Book Comics* and is worth checking out.

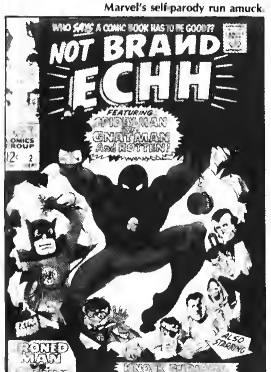
Funnyman was another funny-hero to appear in the '40s. The brainchild of Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Funnyman was really comedian Larry Davis. When trouble reared its ugly head, Davis would disguise himself in a clown suit and a putty nose to battle evil as the Daffy Daredevil. Funnyman's adventures were more light-hearted than satiric but were great fun nonetheless. He starred in six issues of his own title, circa 1948.

Aside from a series of wickedly funny comic-book parodies in *Mad*, funny-heroes entered a period of decline in the 1950s. The immense popularity of the campy Batman TV show in 1966 sparked a revival, as funny-heroes emerged to satisfy camp's criterion of something so bad, that it's good. Gold Key's *The Owl* and Archie's *The Mighty Crusaders* both written by Jerry Siegel, succeeded in becoming so bad, they were horrible. Batman and other DC titles also began to show a camp influence, but the stories usually came off as merely silly. One camp comic of note was *The Adventures of Jerry Lewis* #97, in which our man Jerry and his nephew Renfrew became Ratman and Rotten, the Boy Blunder. Ratman and Rotten assisted (?) the fame-weary Batman and Robin in apprehending The Joker, The Penguin and The Riddler.

Suddenly, super-heroes were everywhere, some played straight and some played for laughs. Fatman was an odd combination of camp and Golden Age whimsy by original Captain Marvel veterans Otto Binder and C.C. Beck, it lasted a mere three issues. Fatman was no relation to The Fat Fury, alias Herbie Popnecker, who'd begun bopping baddies with his super-lollipops in 1964, but had faded away by mid-1967. America's typical teen-ager even got in on the act, as Archie Andrews became Pure-heart the Powerful.

Massive ennui soon accomplished what no super-villain could, as plunging sales finally halted the excessive super-hero boom. Among the titles blown away by the camp backlast was DC's *The Inferior Five*, which had lasted for ten issues. Originally conceived as a parody of Marvel's Fantastic Four, the I5—Awkwardman, Dumb Bunny, The Blimp, White Feather and Merryman—evolved their own silly identity as second-generation super-heroes eager to please their parents, the legendary super-hero group known as The Freedom Brigade. *The Inferior Five* was one of the very few books during the camp craze to deal in direct parodies. During the course of their short but undistinguished career, the I5 encountered take-offs on The Fantastic Four (The Kookie Quartet), The Man From U.N.C.L.E. (C.O.U.S.I.N. F.R.E.D.), Sub-Mariner (Sub-Moron) and Spider-Man (Cobweb Kid). Not surprisingly, DC's own characters were pretty much exempt from parody, outside of the gentle Justice League pastiche of The Freedom Brigade.*

Marvel's self-parody run amuck.




1986 Marvel Comics Group

The Marvel Comics Group was relatively unaffected by the excesses of camp. During this period, Marvel was consolidating its position as the self-proclaimed House of Ideas, the thinking reader's comic-book company. Stan Lee's super-heroes had always maintained a then-unique mixture of humor and soap opera, and thus had no need to mimic the exaggerated silliness of the camp heroes. It could be argued, in fact, that some companies' idea of camp heroes—particularly *The Mighty Crusaders*—were simply inept attempts to duplicate the Marvel formula.

Still, while avoiding camp, Marvel nonetheless decided to enter the funny-hero business with *Not Brand Echh*, a parody title based on Marvel's label for its competition, Brand Echh (hence the book's catch phrase: "Who says a comic has to be good? *Not Brand Echh!*). Unlike *The Inferior Five*, *Not Brand Echh* was a parody anthology rather than a single continuity. Also unlike the I5, *Not Brand Echh* felt no compunction to spare its own company's heroes from satire, as The Fantastical Four, The Inedible Bulk and The Flighty Revengers rubbed shoulders with the likes of Stuporman, Gnatman and Rotten, and the Blunder Agents.

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The Inferior Five—DC's funny heroes.

Forbush-Man, *Not Brank Echh*'s resident super-nebbish, grew out of a running gag in Marvel's Bullpen Bulletins page. Irving Forbush was a fictional member of the Marvel staff whom Stan Lee used as the butt of in-jokes. Ol' Irving was given form in *Not Brand Echh* #5, as our hero first donned the itchy red underwear and inverted metal pot costume (stolen from The Red Tornado) to battle crime as Forbush-Man. Forbush-Man defeated The Blechh Knight, Mr. Hide 'n Seek, Kobra and The Juggernut in his first outing—some nebbish! The Way-Out Wonder returned in the eighth issue and attempted to join The Revengers, The EchhsMen, and Knock Furious and the Agents of S.H.E.E.S.H., but was rejected at every turn. He had an offer to join one other group, but the despondent hero declined the offer, reasoning that "no really famous group would ever want me!" So it was that Forbush-Man passed up his chance to join the Beatles.

*Not Brand Echh* continued until its 13th issue in 1969, though Forbush-Man was more of a mascot than a continuing feature. He survives to this day as the unofficial mascot of *Marvel Age*.

Funny heroes all but vanished during the 1970s. Charlton's *E-Man* was an amusing throwback to the days of Plastic Man, but the book died after 10 issues. DC attempted revivals of *Plastic Man*, *Shazam!* and a chaotic version of *The Metal Men*, but none succeeded.

*The Albatross* was to have been a tongue-in-cheek strip from DC, concerning the misadventures of a convict who slips out of prison each night to fight crime. According to writer Marty Pasko, *The Albatross* was conceived by an unnamed DC editor as a straight super-hero strip,

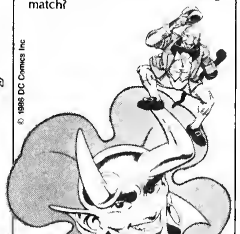
© 1986 Martin Greim

**Thunder Bunny.**

but Pasko thought the concept ludicrous and approached it instead as a funny-hero feature. This clash in editorial direction apparently doomed the strip, and *The Albatross* never saw print.

In contrast to the dearth of funny-heroes in the '70s, the '80s have provided an embarrassment of riches, as a plethora of funny-heroes have emerged, all vying for space on the comic book racks. Martin Greim's *Thunderbunny* was one of the first new funny-heroes to appear, premiering in *Charlton Bullseye* #6 in 1982. Thunderbunny is really Bobby Caswell, a young boy who always wanted to be a super-hero. He got his wish when the alien Doctor Bar-Ko granted him the power to change into Thunderbunny, a super-powered anthropomorphic rabbit. Unlike other mixtures of funny-animals and super-heroes, from *Mighty Mouse* to the later *Captain Carrot and his Amazing Zoo Crew*, *Thunderbunny* mingles thrills and spills in a narrative set in the world of humans, where super-heroes might exist but talking animals don't. *Thunderbunny* subsequently moved to Archie Comics briefly (though long enough to team up with The Mighty Crusaders), and is now published by WaRP Graphics.

DC's *Blue Devil*, which was previewed in *Fury of Firestorm* #24 before charging into his own title, has breathed new life into the tired cliche of the reluctant super-hero. Concerning the exploits of movie stuntman Dan Cassidy and the super-powered costume that has become a part of him, *Blue Devil* has developed its paean to the fun of the early Lee/Ditko *Spider-Man* (while wisely eschewing Spidey's soap opera elements) into a monthly barrage of action and laughs. The book has consistently remained fresh and entertaining, belying the axiom that a title can't sustain itself over an extended length of time without losing all its oomph. Besides, how can you not be entertained by a hero who thinks nothing of challenging Superman to a friendly arm-wrestling match?



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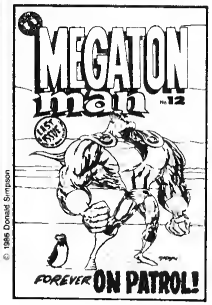
**The Blue Devil.**

*normalman*, an ordinary human trapped in a world of berserk super-characters, appeared in *Cerebus* #56 and 57 before graduating to a 12-part maxi-series. Sort of a *Not Brand Echh*-style book thrust into a continuing narrative, *normalman* has parodied *Superman*, *Marvel*, *Elfquest*, and many others, with the endless roll call of The Legion of Superfluous-Heroes serving as a running gag in early issues. Donald Simpson's *Megaton Man*, a grotesquely-muscled super-oaf, has dealt in parodies of a more biting nature. Marvel's lawyers apparently didn't see the humor of *Megaton Man's* take-offs on The Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Galactus and The Silver Surfer, so *Megaton Man* will continue without the benefit of The Megatropolis Quartet, Wall-Man, Gluttinus, and The Silver Server.




© 1986 Donald Simpson

But the funny-hero success story of the day is Ambush Bug. This raving lunatic debuted inauspiciously enough in *DC Comics Presents* #52, as a teleporting thief bedeviling Superman and that pathetic group of unintentionally funny super-heroes, The New Doom Patrol. The Bug was apparently conceived as a throwaway villain for that issue, and there was little in that first story to indicate anything worth reviving.

However, Ambush Bug did return in *DC Comics Presents* #59. In this case, creator/artist Keith Giffen used a more compatible setting for Ambush Bug's nuttiness. Whereas the first story had The Bug's antics clashing with a straight (albeit dumb) super-hero adventure, his second appearance was a first-class farce, involving a trip to 30th century Metropolis (which Ambush Bug presumed to be 20th century Disneyworld) and a run-in with the astoundingly inept Legion of Substitute Heroes. The result was a madcap romp that established Ambush Bug's looney reputation and which permanently tarnished the once-noble image of the Substitutes; the subsequent *Legion of Substitute Heroes Special* in 1985 would see the group permanently typecast as super-bozos.

There was no stopping the new Ambush Bug now. A lackluster appearance in *Supergirl* #16 followed, as The Bug decided to become a super-hero and mistook Supergirl for the Man of Steel in drag. Manic appearances as a back-up strip

**DC's Ambush Bug—current super-star of the funny set.**

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in *Action Comics* #560, 563 and 567, and another laugh riot in *DC Comics Presents* #81, led into the four-issue *Ambush Bug* mini-series. Such features as "The Ambush Bug Guide To Collecting Comics" and "The Ambush Bug History of the DC Universe" helped to make the mini-series an unparalleled masterpiece of utter nonsense, the most fun you could have with the Comics Code's approval. With a recent *Ambush Bug Stocking Stuffer* and an announced *Son of Ambush Bug* series on the way, it looks like this lunatic's here to stay. Much to Superman's chagrin!

The resurgence of funny-heroes in the '80s may be indicative of a growing trend toward making super-hero comics more fun than they've been in years. This trend has even affected some of the mainstream super-hero stuff: check out Peter David's first *Spider-Man* scripts for evidence of how neatly a sense of fun can be woven into a straight super-hero adventure. DC is continuing with this trend, as can be seen in new series like *Booster Gold* and the simply charming *'Mazing Man*, who resembles nothing so much as Forbush-Man's second cousin. The trend has stopped short of silliness, such as custard pie fights between Daredevil and The Kingpin or Batman adding a Bat-seltzer sprayer to his utility belt arsenal, but it makes a nice change of pace from the grim super-hero tales that have been in fashion for so long.

*However*, if Clark Kent ever steps into a nearby phone booth and suddenly discovers that he's left his super-suit at the cleaners, that's when the joke's gone too far. Either that, or he'll have to change his name to The Flash. ●

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*CARL CAFARELLI is the author of the E-Man hero history in* Amazing Heroes *#88.*

** For a full account of the Inferior Five's story, see Richard Morrissey's Hero History of the group in AH #35.*

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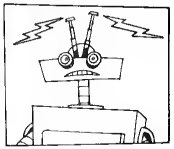

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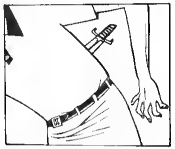

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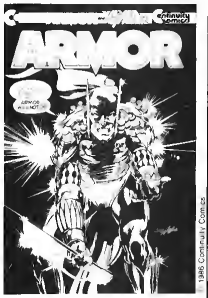


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## PLAYING JACKS

**ARMOR AND SILVERSTREAK #1**
**written and inked by NEAL ADAMS**
**pencilled by TOM GRINDBERG**
**colored by CORY ADAMS**
**Continuity Comics**
**$2.00**

From out of space comes a small armada of invading space ships. Their target is a small town in Canada. There, we are introduced to the three central characters: the Keaton siblings. If their names are any indication, the kids' parents were sorely lacking in imagination. The oldest boy is named Jacques; his younger brother is named Jack, and their sister's name is Jackie! Just three Jacks in search of a rubber ball.

We learn very little about the Keaton kids in this first issue. Jacques is blond, freckled, and fast on his feet. Jack is bigger, more athletic and aggressive, a student of the martial arts. All we know about Jackie is that she's a redhead with lousy taste in boyfriends.

Not that it matters now. Her latest fella is blown to pieces in the first wave of the alien attack. Jackie herself disappears; her brothers don't know if she is alive or dead. Jacques tries to reach their parents, only to see them and their house vanish in an explosive fireball.

The combat zone situation leaves the young men no time to grieve. Finding weapons in the town armory, they attempt to fight the invaders, only to find themselves overcome by a noxious cloud of gas.

Jack Keaton awakens to find himself onboard the flagship of the alien leader, Commander Rage, traveling ever farther from Earth. Discovering Jack's reflexes and fighting capabilities to be superior, Rage instructs that he be given gladiatorial training. He is placed under the tutelage of a four-armed gent known as Go-Gog.

The Earthling is given the code-name Armor, clothed in a colorful costume, and armed with weapons endemic to the martial arts. Following intensive training, he is put to his first real test—a fight to the death with another costumed character, named Silverstreak (Guess who?).

I felt like I was an old friend to this book, having previewed it for *Amazing Heroes* nearly a year ago. That fact alone hints at the major problem this mini-series will have in finding reader acceptance. It is a product of the infamous Continuity Graphics studio—best known for the books they *don't* get out. The indicia optimistically states that *Armor* and *Silverstreak* will be appearing bi-monthly, but I doubt seriously that you could find anyone willing to lay odds that it will.

As for the story here, it's actually not bad. I think it would have been much stronger had more time been spent developing the main characters before launching into the alien invasion, but hopefully this will be handled more thoroughly in subsequent issues. While the plot does not sparkle with originality, neither is it so hackneyed that it creaks from overuse.

Its most obvious weakness is in the script. Neal Adams is a visual storyteller par excellence, but he is not an exceptional writer. In fact, his ear for dialogue is on a level not far above that of Jack Kirby. None of it rings true.

I would like to comment on the pencilling of Tom Grindberg, but I haven't the foggiest idea what it looks like. The story is inked by Neal Adams and, as always, he completely overshadows the penciller with his own style. I really have no complaint about that, because Neal has ranked high on my list of favorite artists for many years.

While this may be somewhat frustrating for Grindberg, it is a visual treat for the reader. It can be said that Tom displays a good sense of pacing and layout, but it would be nice if he was allowed to both pencil and ink a pin-up page or something, so we could get a better idea of exactly how much he contributes to the look of the book.

Had that been all there was to this book, it would have gotten off pretty lightly. The final eight pages, however, are devoted to a group of heroes presumably known as The Basics (That's what the copyright notice reads, anyway). They are four beings called Urth, Ayre, Fyre and Watr. Your grandparents may have told you about them, for they first appeared in the legendary second issue of *Ms. Mystic*.

From their names, you can deduce that these heroes possess the powers of the four classic elements—just like the Elementals. They also bear more than a passing resemblance to the Fantastic Four—so much so that, when Fyre bursts into flames, she yells (Brace yourself): "Fyre's on!" I can't tell if this (and the rest of the tale) is meant to be funny, but if so, it fails dismally.

A mistake was made in dropping us right into the middle of this story, with no build-up at all. The creators didn't take into account the fact that many readers have never seen these characters before, and even those who have, have probably long forgotten anything about them in the many months since last they appeared.

A worse mistake was the story itself. The heroes launch right into a pitched battle with a crew of construction workers—who give the superheroes all they can handle. The menace here is a crew boss who has been purchasing inferior quality steel for use on the building in progress.

But wait! The steel really isn't inferior after all... but the workers were told it was... and some were

paid to keep quiet about it ... and others aren't ... and apparently the boss *thought* he was committing a crime: but he really wasn't ... so there's nothing for the heroes to do but pack up and go home!

As one of the characters remarks: "I don't get it." Capping off this mess are the wise words of kindly old Dr. Raas: "This world of ours is very rarely understood in terms of black and white. Almost never! If all the problems of the world were easy to understand, the world would be a *comic book*." Right. And if all comic books were this poorly written, we'd soon be living in a world that had no comic books.

At least with this story I *can* comment on the pencils—though it too was inked by Adams and company. (No one is given credit for the script. I wonder why?) I have had the opportunity to briefly examine some of Brian Murray's pencil work: enough to say that he shows a lot of promise.

The first issue of *Armor and Silverstreak* has a back-up story that is dreadful, and a lead story that is only so-so, but as do all Continuity books, it boasts of beautiful artwork. For that reason—and that reason alone—I'll give it a borderline recommendation.

But if issue #2 isn't on the shelves two months hence, I'm afraid Continuity may have to kiss off the few fans that have remained faithful to them. If they can't overcome the delays that plague their books, they would do better to publish nothing but one-shot titles that are complete in one issue.

# POLISH CHOKE

**ADOLESCENT RADIOACTIVE BLACK BELT HAMSTERS #1**
**written by DON CHIN**
**drawn by PARSONAVICH**
**edited by DON CHIN and CAT YRONWODE**
**Eclipse Comics**
**$1.50**

In the year 1977, a scientist named Professor "Cosby" discovers an object in outer space, which proves to be a massive glob of Radioactive Cosmic Jello. Thus, by the middle of page 2, we are painfully aware of the horror that faces us—banal, sophomoric attempts at humor.

To stave off the cosmic crud, it will be necessary to send a crew into space on a suicidal mission to blow it up. America offers to send Billy Carter; Canada volunteers the services of the McKenzie Brothers; Great Britain nominates the Sex Pistols; and Poland pledges four

© 1986 Chin and Parsonavich

hamsters. When a book is reduced to using Polish jokes three pages into the story, you know the writer has not had a clever idea since it first occurred to him that someone would be foolish enough to publish such garbage.

For some strange reason (probably having to do with the fact that you have an artist who displays no more talent than does the writer), the hamsters don't *look* even remotely like hamsters, but rather like little hairless apes. They appear to be reasonably intelligent, however, having no difficulty in manipulating the controls of their space ship. Of course, if they were really smart, they would have found a way out of this comic.

Flying into the midst of the Jello cloud, they detonate the ship's self-destruct mechanism. Though it would have been more merciful for all concerned (especially the readers) if they had died in the conflagration, such is not to be.

The four hamsters survive a plunge back to Earth, and are taken into a Tibetan monastery, where they are trained in such Oriental martial arts as the use of a .44 Magnum. The humor, already abysmal, reaches its absolute nadir when the scripter delivers a "why do hamsters wear black belts" joke.

Upon completing their training, they leave the monastery and set off on a journey to the outside world. They pause long enough to ruthlessly murder a drug dealer who just happened to be driving through the Himalayas, then steal his car and his money. They must be teaching a different moral code in Tibetan monasteries nowadays.

After wading through superfluous panels shamelessly thrown in to pad a story that died 18 pages earlier, the hamsters board a plane bound for New York. A gang of terrorists attempt to hijack the jet, thus giving the martial arts mammals an excuse to spend the remainder of the story punching, kicking and shooting them into submission.

Raise your hand if you guessed that *Black Belt Hamsters* will *not* be receiving my highest recommendation. Good for you, boys and girls.

From the beginning to end, this book is a bloody bore: the worst piece of literary offal it has been my misfortune to read in many a month. It is the lowest form of slime. A thesaurus doesn't contain enough synonyms to describe how terrible it is.

The very premise behind it is ridiculous. Eastman and Laird had an original, if not highly inspired idea when they created their Ninja Turtles to spoof Frank Miller's *Ronin*. To attempt a parody of a book that is itself a parody defies logic. To do so with a package such as this borders on sheer idiocy.

You know, there seems to be something seriously wrong with many of the independent comic book publishers in America today. For years they have accused mainstream comics of producing nothing but artless superhero titles, complained about them flooding the market with needless reprints.

So what are we getting from the independents—most notably Eclipse—as an "alternative?" Reprints from old horror magazines. Where is the originality? From the same company that publishes the excellent *Miracle Man* we now get a rip-off that can't compare in quality to the efforts of a couple of guys who get out to publish their own book.

In the real world, there is absolutely nothing wrong with publishing whatever you must to raise the capital needed to remain in business. But it certainly puts the lie to any claims that all the independents have greater devotion to artistic aspirations than do Marvel or DC. Let's call a spade a spade.

And let's call *Hamsters* dreck. In both story and art, it displays a crudity to which even the worst of the







undergrounds would be ashamed to lay claim. *Mutant Turtles* has proven to be little more than a one-joke book—but that's still 100 per cent more than you'll find here.

This is not to say that Messrs. Chin and Parsonavich should commit seppuku. They should definitely give comics a second try—preferably after they graduate from junior high school.

# STARS AND GRIPES

**SHURIKEN #2**
**written and illustrated by REGGIE BYERS**
**inked by CHRIS KALNICK**
**Victory Productions**
**$1.50**

Kyoko Shidara stands face-to-face with a dealy Yakuza assassin known as Eagle Claw. Sword drawn, he is prepared to kill Kyoko's friend Joan Harlowe. A policeman is on hand, but he is so nervous and afraid that clearly he will be of no assistance.

So Kyoko takes action herself. Faster than the eye can follow, she hurls three of the razor-sharp stars which give her the codename—Shuriken. All three hit their mark, and the assassin goes down, the blood from his pierced leg staining the floor.

Kyoko questions Eagle Claw in his native tongue, but she is not prepared for what she hears. He calls her Kiko—a pet name known only to her dead parents ... and her brother. Stunned by this revelation, she is taken by surprise when the killer releases a smoke bomb which hides his escape.

It does not end there, however. Later that night, Kyoko's brother strikes at her in her own home. He has come not to kill this time, but to tell Kyoko that he will not slay her friend, instead planning to return to Tokyo.

Kyoko pleads with him to leave the Yakuza, even as she has decided to leave the organization for which she works. Having learned that it too is nothing but a gang of killers, she wants nothing more to do with it. Eagle Claw lacks her resolve and integrity, the Yakuza is his home now, and he cannot—will not—leave it.

He exits through the window, and Kyoko can't bring herself to follow. She is far too shaken, disturbed by what he is—and by the fear that she may be no better.

*Shuriken* is a book published independently by its creator Reggie Byers, who is probably far better known as one of the artists who contribute to the various *Robotech* titles from comico. The Oriental influence is evident in both his story and art.

The story in progress has as its roots the tales of family honor and revenge that seem to be icons of Japanese literature. These are motifs that have nearly as great an impact on Western sensibilities, and therefore provide fertile ground for tales of fiction. It is an archetypal saga rife with possibilities.

Those possibilities are not fully realized yet. Like Neal Adams, Reggie has a firm image of what he wants to tell in his story. Yet he is still

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somewhat lacking in the mechanical skills necessary to tell that story with the greatest effect. His sense of pacing is erratic, with some scenes rushed and overly compacted, others extended beyond their actual need. His use of dialogue is noticeably clumsy, at times verging on the amateurish. These faults diminish what would otherwise be a powerful and emotionally gripping tale.

It is with his artwork that Byers creates the most excitement. Here too there are all too many signposts of a young man still in the process of mastering his craft. Poorly proportioned bodies, inappropriate choices in range and layout perspectives, and lapses into a cartoonishness more reminiscent of an Archie comic than of a Japanese manga, all plague his art. But this is largely offset by an exuberance, a sheer love of illustration that comes through most plainly and is highly contagious.

And he is progressing. His pencils in this issue show improvement over those of the first issue, and I have no doubt that such progress will continue to be evident in each successive issue to come. Already, in the series of "Shuriken Sketches" he runs at the back of the issue, Reggie displays an artistic style elegant in its simplicity, beautiful in its starkness. If he can transform that quality to his panel artwork, he will develop into a major talent. The sketches presented here also indicate that his newfound inker, Michio Okamura, will contribute a strong, solid line that will enhance Byers's pencils.

In what may prove mildly surprising to those who have me comfortably pegged as a conventionalist, I must admit to a growing attraction for the Japanese comic art now making its presence felt in America. One of the nice things about *Shuriken* is that I can indulge in that fascination without having to wade through masses of metamorphic robots.

I suppose ideally a reviewer should maintain a detached objectivity at all times, but that will not be achieved until such time as machines are programmed to take out jobs. The creative process is often an emotional rather than an intellectual one, our reactions to it are just as often the same.

Which is probably the only explanation for my continued interest in a book I might otherwise recommend you pass by. The series *Master of Kung Fu* had as a recurring theme the rising and advancing of a spirit. In *Shuriken*, I see the opportunity to watch and partake in the advancement of Reggie Byers's artistry.

My gut instinct is that it will continue to grow—and I will continue to follow and report on that growth.

# OTTER-LY RIDICULOUS

**STRATA #1**
**written by JOE JUDT**
**pencilled by RAY MURTAUGH**
**inked by JIM BROZMAN**
**Renegade Press**
**$2.00**

Inspector Charles Phillip Flambeau has a recurring nightmare in which he is chased through the streets of London by the nebulous being known as the Bogey Man. When it wrapped its icy tendrils around him, he would awaken in his own bed. This time is different, however.

This time, he awakens ... somewhere else.

He finds himself in the upside-down domicile of a self-proclaimed wizard named Owelle, on a strange world called Strata. It is a world that is completely flat, populated by ogres and all manner of strange creatures.

Understandably enough, Flambeau would prefer to be back in his own world. Owelle tells him that the only being who can help him return to Earth is Mother Nature.

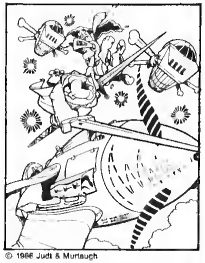
This presents a bit of a problem. Ms. Nature was once the benign guardian of Strata. Then, two thousand years ago, the loss of her lover apparently drove her insane. As Owelle puts it, "Immortal demigoddesses aren't well-known for their emotional stability." To seek her help is to court disaster.

Flambeau decides to take the risk and seek out the deity. He does not venture out on his quest alone, however. Accompanying him are Lancelot and Arthur, two "Zen Bhuddist Otters" who think they are legendary heroes. Considering their lack of brains, it is a wonder they think at all. Adding to the confusion and the danger is the fact that Owelle has not been completely honest; he is using Flambeau to further some devious plan of the wizard's own contrivance.

And then there are the air pirates.

*Strata* presents a competently written fantasy adventure. Too little time is spent developing the character of Flambeau, and too much is devoted to the slash and stab antics of the otters. One would expect them to be played as humorous foils to the human, but there is nothing about them which is in the slightest bit amusing. They are simply two talking animals that don't have a lick of sense.

The plot involved—a man is mysteriously transported to another



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world to which he must try to adjust or from which he must try to escape—is at least as old as the early pulps (and indeed has antecedents in ancient mythology). Still, it is one that has not been milked completely dry, and can still be presented effectively. Scripter Joe Judt has done a reasonably good job in that department, though certainly not delivering anything particularly noteworthy or memorable.

His yeoman-like efforts are completely undermined by the poor visuals to be found in this issue. It is a veritable cornucopia of rotten fruit. The art looks like the work of a man who learned to draw from reading old Harvy comics while dropping acid.

Penciller Ray Murtaugh's panels weren't laid out on the page so much as spilled. Each page is a cluttered jumble of images fighting for attention but succeeding only in obscuring those around, above and beneath them. The only uniformity they present is in their unattractiveness. The almost total lack of line work leaves nothing but sparse black-and-white illustrations that blend one into the other.

Even with the support of a strong art, the story in the premiere issue of *Strata* would probably not be enough to lure many readers back for the second issue.

Without support, I'm afraid it falls completely over the edge.

# SHADES OF GRAY

**LORDS OF THE ULTRA-REALM #1**
**written and edited by DOUG MOENCH**
**illustrated and colored by PAT BRODERICK**
**DC Comics**
**$1.50**

Michael Savage was an American soldier, held captive in Vietnam for 13 years. Returned to America at last, he faces court-martial on charges of having collaborated with the enemy. It is a different world he returns to than the one he left, a gray world into which he might never fit.

Elsewhere, there is another world. It can best be described in the words of the woman named Scala, who chronicles the course of its history:

"Though occupying the same space as the foundation world called Earth, the Ultra-Realm inhabits a different dimension. Embodying the collective sub-conscious of Earth, it is a world of opposing beauty and ugliness, an exaggeration of mankind's qualities and defects manifested to extremes.

"The world itself is split into hemispheres of perpetual day and eternal night: one side hosting everything noble and good culled from the emotions and aspirations of man, while the other side is rife with every dark fantasy's most foul and repellent attributes."

All that from a single panel of this story. Put more simply, the Ultra-Realm is a world on which exists only the good guys and the bad guys. There is no in-between. The two opposing forces form an eternal balance, represented on one side by seven Lords of Light and on the other side by seven Lords of Darkness.

Something occurs herein, however, that tips the scales and threatens to destroy both Earth and the Ultra-Realm. Maurkon, the dark Prince of Rage, attacks the gleaming fortress of Falkon, the Prince of Bliss. Taken off-guard while his inner energy is depleted, Falkon bravely resists, only to fall before Maurkon's black sword.

With Falkon dead, the cosmic balance tilts in the favor of darkness, and a mystic portal leading to Earth is opened. The evil Maurkon steps through the doorway, emerging in an earthly video arcade. There, he assumes the appearance of a common street thug. But there is one man in the arcade who can see through his disguise—Michael Savage.

Referring to Savage as "an archetype—the foundation soul of Bliss and me," Maurkon attempts to slay the Earthling. In the course of the struggle, Savage stumbles through the portal and is swept away to the Ultra-Realm. There, his very essence merges with the body of the fallen Prince of Bliss. Falkon's form is resurrected, though it is now directed by the mind of Michael Savage. The fate of the two worlds now rests in his hands.

Knowing creator/scripter Doug Moench for the literate man he is, I daresay he drew his inspiration for this mini-series in part from both

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Platonic philosophy and the psychological theories of Carl Jung. In execution, however, it more closely resembles the same sources from which *Strata* sprang. It would seem to owe a greater debt to Edgar Rice Burroughs than to Plato.

And there's nothing wrong with that. Burroughs could always be counted upon to tell a rousing yarn, whether his chosen theatre was the jungles of the South Pacific or the exotic plains of Mars.

On the other hand, it is not the sort of production that inspires ecstatic praise. Moench tells his story well (though the dialogue throughout seems terribly forced and stilted), but he fails to pull you into it, to generate sufficient sparks of excitement.

The severe culture shock experienced by Michael Savage also seems overplayed. This country has not changed *that* much in the past 13 years—certainly not to the extent it did during the 20-year period when Captain America was on ice, for example, or even in the eight years preceding Savage's incarceration. By over-emphasizing this aspect of his alienation, it comes off as no more than a plot contrivance.

Before this saga completely unfolds, it may prove to be vastly different from the standard adventure fantasy—but this first installment does not provide the impetus to carry us on to subsequent developments.

Unlike the author of *Strata*, Moench is blessed with solid, if unspectacular, artistic support. Even here, though, Pat Brodrick gives an erratic performance that leaves a slightly ambiguous feeling toward his contribution. By and large, he performs admirably, capturing the look and feel of both worlds. Interspersed throughout, however, are panels which seem to denote a disinterest in applying thought and detail.

The work here also displays several examples of a problem with proportion that has plagues Broderick throughout his professional career. For reasons I could not even guess at, he often has difficulty matching the lower half of a character's body with the upper half. Thus we might see Michael Savage with the head and torso of a fully grown man—striding on legs the size and length of a 12-year-old boy's.

While he is not an outstanding artist, Broderick is one on whom you can depend to deliver a reasonably good effort. So it is here. Since this review is being written on the basis of a black-and-white copy, I can't comment on the job he did as colorist, other than to say I look forward to seeing the finished product.

My first impression of *Lords of the Ultra-Realm* is consistent with the theme of the book itself. I found itto be neither terrific nor terrible—but rather floating in that gray area between the two. While I can find no firm basis on which to condemn it, neither can I find cause to wholeheartedly recommend it.

Perhaps we should all simply meet at the equator between Light and Shadow—and flip a coin.

# KYRA ELEISON

**KYRA #1**
**written and illustrator by ROBIN ATOR**
**Elsewhere Productions**
**$1.95**

Somewhere in the steaming jungles of Asia, "south of the Himalayas," lives the young woman named Kyra—self-proclaimed protector of this still-primitive land. Interlopers have intruded on her domain, led by a sorceress, Johanna Starling. She has the power to shoot balls of fire from her hands and to call forth zombies from the grave. But Kyra possesses something even more formidable—a body that looks great in a two-piece loincloth.

*Kyra* reminds me of high camp—it is so bad, it's almost good! Its strongest claim to distinction is the fact that its heroine is supposed to look like a female weight lifter (though in actuality she looks no more musclebound than, say, the Black Widow in most panels).

What does appear to be unique is the book's source of inspiration. Kyra is the daughter of Kageena, who starred in a series of four-page stories published in the 1950s. They were produced not by a comic book company, but rather by a group that specialized in leather and bondage publications aimed at fetishists!

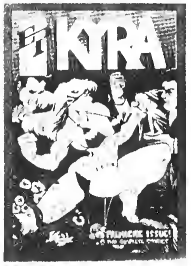
I love it—first Betty in the "Rocketeer" series, and now this. What next—The New Adventures of Candy Barr? Gypsy Rose Lee—Stripper Without Fear? Reform School Girls—The Second Generation? To repeat—I love it.

I can't say the same about the story presented here. This has to be Jungle Hero Plot #1—the exploitive and greedy outsiders bent on raping the virgin land, stripping it of its mineral wealth while running roughshod over the inhabitants. All this story needed was a cameo appearance by Johnny Weismuller.

The one deviation from the standard formula is the introduction of the zombie into the struggle, and this only serves to make it doubly absurd. Kyra is saved from its putrescent embrace by the fact that her Daddy read to her as a child—and it just so happens that one of thsoe books mentioned the fact that salt will kill zombies. What else did he read to his little girl—the collected works of the Marquis De Sade? One also has to wonder why, with this level of magical ability, Johanna Starling couldn't find an easier way to make money than by strip-mining a jungle.

Hackneyed plots can be salvaged, but not with the kind of script you have here. Creator Robin Ator opens the story with long, over-written captions of exposition that merely get in the way of the story, needlessly explaining action evident from the illustrations. I also wondered why captions were so often used where dialogue would have been more appropriate. Then the characters opened their mouths—and I knew why.

Mr. (or Ms.) Ator displays not the slightest skill in writing dialogue. Thus, we have Johanna Starling commanding her minions to "Destroy her completely!" This, as opposed to destroying her only partially. Didn't the character Clubber Lang have a similar line in the movie *Rocky III*? Something to the effect of "I'm gonna destroy him ... real bad." Then, when the zombie rises from the grave, a disgusted Kyra ex-

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claims. "Yuck! I can smell the reek from it even upwind!"

Ator fares slightly better in the artistic department, employing a pseudo Klaus Janson style that is at least well-suited for black-and-white reproduction. It looks rather obscure and sketchy, however, with unimaginative layout and design. Clumsy lettering gives the book an amateur appearance.

There is a second Kyra story in this issue as well, one reprinted from an earlier underground appearance. While it isn't really a story, merely an episode, it is totally honest in its primary intent: Kyra's ample breasts spill out in every direction from beneath her inadequate halftop, and she kills the villain by clamping the man's head tightly between her silken thighs—his face buried in her groin—then releasing her grip after swinging out over a deep chasm. You can't get much more blatant than that. (Since they were in a reprint frame of mind, it would have been nice if they had chosen to reprint one of the original Kageena stories in its entirety.)

In a way, though, it's good that someone has revived the Jungle Girl comic. Have you priced back issues of any of the many such titles published in the '50s? Forget it, unless you own considerable stock in Chase Manhattan. The last mainstream attempt at such a title that comes immediately to mind was Marvel's short-lived *Shanna the She-Devil*, and that was published back before Stan Lee started making cartoons.

So if you're a fan of the genre (and I must confess to it being one of my occasional guilty pleasures), you might want to pick up *Kyra* as a curiosity piece. Where else are you going to find a jungle comic that opens with a quotation from Aristotle and uses Roman numerals to number the pages? Just don't expect great fiction, kind of a story.

Though you will get a very nice photograph of an attractive model on the back cover.

## RAPID FIRE

For various reasons, the stack of comics I had set aside for review purposes has grown perilously high in the past few weeks. Therefore, in an effort to relieve some of the backlog—and because I don't want them to go completely without mention—I decided to offer brief mini-reviews of some of the books on hand.

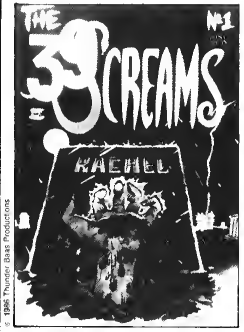
**Fish Police #2:** In reviewing the first issue of this series, I stated that it might be a sleeper hit. But if you're awake—then get down to your local comic shop and pick up a copy. It is one of the best written, best drawn of the independently published comics on the market today. Of course, it needs your support to *remain* on the market. Second warning: buy it now, before you have to pay outrageously inflated prices for back issues.

**Alter Ego #1:** First Comics indulges Roy Thomas's lifetime love affair with Golden Age comics, while Ron Harris continues to show that he can draw just as badly as did the artists of that bygone era. Not a bad effort really—but I think we'd all be happier if someone would let Roy edit a reprint book composed of genuine Golden Age classics.

**WarP Graphics Annual #1:** A mostly forgettable effort, though it is nice to see all the WarP characters in color. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the best offering was the "A Distant Soil" vignette. For the first time, I could actually figure out what was going on. Creator Colleen Doran has made continued and impressive improvement as an artist, and here proves that her inked work is just as attractive as her pencilled art. As might be expected, the "Elfquest" and "Thunderbunny" stories here are also well done.

**The Badger #12:** Even if you have never read a single issue in this series—you must pick up this one. The military briefing Badger gives to a roomful of animals is priceless. If the book continues at this level, it will probably edge into my Top Ten by next year.

**The 39 Screams #1:** How to describe this book? If you had a group of ten-year-old boys imitating bad horror stories from the 1950s—this is what you'd get. The publisher claims this book gives you "cause to miss sleep." That's certainly true—it's impossible to sleep while you're laughing. This mess comes to us from Baltimore—wasn't that the last city in America to have its own film

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review board? Maybe it could now turn its efforts toward assuring that books like this never see print.

**Pelleas and Melisande #1-2:** P. Craig Russell continues to strengthen his claim as the most articulate visualist in comics today. His neo-Romantic style is perfectly suited to this operatic tale of tragically star-crossed lovers. This, as with most of his work today, is not particularly enjoyable to read. It is, however, sublime to feel. Considering the nature of it, I would imagine that copies of the series would soon be readily available for less than cover price. When that happens, avail yourselves of it.

**New Triumph (featuring Northguard) #3:** If you're looking for a slightly different approach to superhero adventures, this would be a good choice. Our Canadian neighbors have certainly done their share to support the American comic book industry; it's time for us to reciprocate. And efforts such as *Mr X* and *New Triumph* are deserving places to start.

**Whisper #1:** If you're expecting martial arts chop-socky, you'd best forget this book. The rest of you should be captivated by this disturbing saga of a woman overwhelmed by life. Neophyte artist Dell Barras still has a lot of rough edges, but at its finest his work resembles that of a cleaner, less chaotic Rudy Nebres. Worth a look.

Well, that takes care of that. Until next time. When you'd better be here, or else I'll destroy you. Mostly completely (I love it). In the meantime, remember these words of wisdom I spotted outside a local Baptist church:

Any fool can criticize—and usually does. ●



# AMAZING READERS

*LOS BROS. HERNANDEZ*
*Somewhere in California*

### Beyond Gravy Scum

For the record: The Bros. do not think of R.A. Jones "... with much the same regard you have for the scum that forms atop gravy that has sat too long"; no, he's something worse: a fan-boy.

*BRENT ANDERSON*
*San Diego, CA*

### No Problem

As a talented and accomplished artist, Kerry Gammill doesn't need to apologize to me for the non-transgression of drawing for his public.

The Wolverine illustration I drew for *Marvel Fanfare* #10 was the most popular of the five in the portfolio, and I can't recount the number of requests I've had at comic conventions from appreciative art collectors to recreate it for them. So in light of this I would like to extend my thanks to Kerry for helping me supply the demand.

Oh, and just for the record, I'd like to verify that I've never drawn an illo like the one of Iron Fist which accompanied Kerry's letter (which is terrific, by the way!)

*MIC McCONNELL*
*Richmond, VA*

### Poorly X-ecuted

I have just completed *X-Factor* #5 and with that issue I shall terminate my subscription. I read the *Avengers* and *Fantastic Four* prequels and then waded through the first five issues of this maudlin mutant muck and I have had enough. This is probably the most poorly executed, most boring ongoing comic series from a major comic company in the 1980s.

When I first saw the cover of #5—a cheap rip-off of John Buscema's cover from *Avengers Special* #2—I suspected that I was buying my last issue of this title. I have been dissatisfied since #1, however, and I would like to explain why.

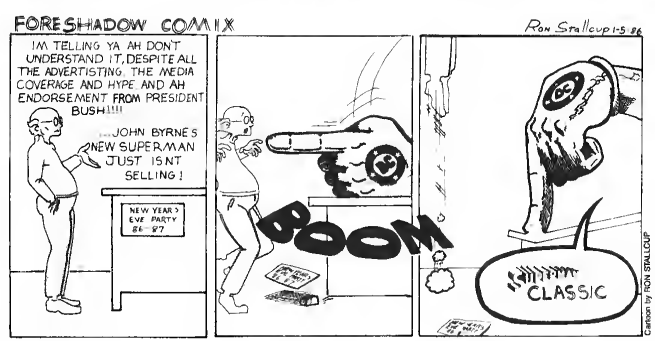
First, the resurrection of Jean Grey. I won't spend a lot of time on this matter because numerous writers have elsewhere criticized it sharply and intelligently. Suffice it to say that Marvel used to have a sort of unofficial slogan: "When we kill 'em, they stay dead!" It seems that Marvel no longer feels bound by this philosophy which it once carried as some sort of quasi-religious banner. Realism was once all-important to Marvel. Times change.

Second, the re-humanization of Hank McCoy. Back when Hank first turned blue and fuzzy in the pages of *Amazing Adventures*, I thought it odd but interesting. Later, I appreciated the new ground it broke and what a bold move it was for an established character. It was sort of like killing a major character. Apparently Marvel thought so, too. They have accorded it the same permanency. Oh well.

Third, the return of the Beast to his former grandiose verbosity. Don't get me wrong, the *concept* of this move I applaud. The execution, on the other hand, has me appalled. Bob Layton has proven that he has neither vocabulary nor eloquence sufficient to re-create McCoy's speech-patterns on a par with the Lee-Thomas days of old. I understand that Louise Simonson will begin scripting with issue #6. Perhaps she can do better.

Fourth, the *modus operandi* of the X-Factor team. While it is a unique operation for a super-hero team, it has obviously *not* been considered carefully. Like the revival of Jean, much space has been devoted to criticism of this aspect of *X-Factor*, most of it focusing on the fact that anti-mutant hysteria is perpetuated by X-Factor's activity and publicity. In the long run, the actions of Scott Summers et al. will do irreparable damage to mutantkind.

While I agree with this assessment, I think there is much more glaring flaw in this set-up. Basically, X-Factor holds itself out as a private organization which will (for a high fee) hunt down United States citizens—remember, no legislative or judicial decree has deemed mutants otherwise, regardless of public opinion—who have not only not been found



guilty of any crime but have not even been accused of one!! Upon locating the "fugitive" mutants, X-Factor kidnaps them!! Kidnapping is against the law, people. Where is the ACLU while all of this is going on? Where are the police? The FBI? From a legal point of view, the credibility of X-Factor's activities is stretched to the point of absurdity. No one who once appreciated the characterization that made Claremont's X-Men great could possibly tolerate this tripe.

Fifth, the behavior of Scott Summers. The last time I saw Scott in the pages of the X-Men, he was happily married to Madelyne. Since then, he has walked out on both her and their child and aside from an occasional, token reference to his indecision and misery, he neither thinks of them nor communicates with them. When Madelyne sues him for divorce on grounds of desertion and demands child-support, his ass is going to be in a sling, considering he has never held a paying job. Meanwhile Jean Grey may be opening herself up to an alienation of affections suit.

Of course, this whole Scott-Madelyne-Jean situation will probably be resolved with the remarkably original technique of having Professor Charles Xavier return to remove all painful memories from the appropriate parties! Way to go, Charlie! Deux ex machina, indeed!

Sixth, the scripting. Has anyone read this (snicker) dialogue? Check out #5, but for God's sake don't go out and buy one to do it! As a "valleygirl" villainess named Stinger clobbers Iceman (in between perfunctory exclamations of "Grody," and "fer sher") she says, "Boy, the Ice Guy is a humongous downer." On the next page Cyclops gets a little p.o'd and shouts, "You treacherous scum! I'll blast you out of existence!" Is Layton serious? He'd have to advance light years from this to get to "see Spot run!" Just putting the title "writer" under his name in the credits should leave him open for a false advertising suit.

Seventh, the art. Half-hearted attempts at background; zero detail; fingers, toes or anything placed closely together merge to become one large unit. Perspective is nonexistent. Boring.

Of course, *X-Factor* is tremendously popular and makes scads of money. Marvel also claims it is introducing a whole new generation to the original X-Men. The latter statement is a lie. They are cheap, tawdry copies and I have read my last issue of this abominable magazine.

Thanks for listening.

★ *The thing that puzzles me is why Marvel would want to sabotage the foundation of their own Mutant meta-fiction. It seems to me that Dark Phoenix has been the definitive Marvel storyline of this era. Its influence has been pervasive throughout the Marvel line and to resurrect Jean Grey at this point is an insult to anybody who cared about that story in the first place. Oh well, it's their company. But I would be curious to hear how Chris Claremont feels about X-Factor. By the way, would you buy X-Factor if Walt Simonson drew it?* —DS

(Illustration by WILLIE BLYBERG; character © Marvel Comics Group)

*PHILIP M. BOTWINICK*
*Woodhaven, NY*

### A Crisis Crisis

I feel a little silly writing this letter, but events over the past few months came to a head after reading the letter columns in *All-Star Squadron* #57. I feel I'd like to let my feelings be known, and *Amazing Heroes* has always been the fanzine that has shown a love of comics much like *The Comic Reader* used to.

For me it has been a particularly gruelling decade for many reasons. I have lived through losing both my parents to cancer, one after the other, and my life has sometimes felt like a living nightmare. Throughout my life comics have been that world I could become a part of for a while to help make the real world much more bearable. Perhaps because of them I still am able to function and make the most out of life. During the years when a little boy who was not very athletic had nowhere to turn, the heroes of all the different publishers were always there to spur me on.

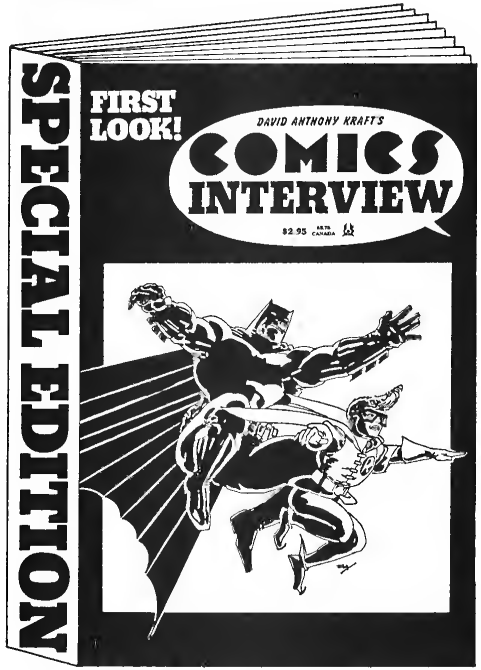
I've come along way from those days of loneliness, but the comics that I read as a child and into adulthood will always have a special place in my heart. For some reason I am not as excited by them as before, and my tastes have expanded into other areas, but I don't know if it is because my priorities have changed or whether the books produced just don't have the same excitement to






# FRANK MILLER'S DARK KNIGHT

Issue #31 of David Anthony Kraft's COMICS INTERVIEW features a DARK KNIGHT cover by Miller and an exclusive and very revealing inside interview with Frank that offers an advance look at his stunning new DC series, complete with illustrations and even sequences from the first and second issues of DARK KNIGHT!




Also in COMICS INTERVIEW #31 --

FRED FINGER, son of the man who is the Dark Knight's forgotten co-creator, shares the sad secrets of his father's life. BOB KANE offers a candid conversation about the creation of The Batman. We take you from the First Batman Story behind the scenes into a seldom-seen side of comics, all the way to Miller's Last Batman Story!

ALL THIS -- AND MUCH, MUCH MORE IN ISSUE #31...

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them. I collect Golden Age Books now because they seem to be able to illustrate what a comic can do if writers tried. Today's books only seem to feel that giving the characters problem after problem will keep a reader's interest.

It seems to me that the writers who are always telling the continuity freaks... such as myself, that these characters are not real, have placed a double standard on the books. They want to make their characters as real as possible, but only as far as each writers feels a character should be. Because the comic book universes became so complex, the companies decided that a reorganization was in order. DC has just completed its *Crisis* series and until this month I never realized the repercussions of what was going to be done to characters I grew up with.

In order to make a consistent universe out of characters that are a part of the imagination it seems that someone has decided to play 1984 with us. I feel like Winston Smith when I pick up a DC comic now. I know that the characters had a past different from the one that is now written, but it appears that people like me will become an anachronism soon.

The new retroactive history of the DC Universe has wiped out all the stories that I read throughout my life and had negated everything I have made a part of the person I am. There was never a Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman or many others during the '30s. All of the adventures of the All-Star Squadron in a couple of months will be about a group of characters who were not actually published before. I have no connection with the characters who now exist. *World's Finest Comics* was a 30-year mistake, according to DC—look at the current *JLA*, where Superman actually says he doesn't like Batman. Are these the same characters I thrilled to read about as a youngster? Where have all the heroes gone?

I do realize these are fictional characters, but after being part of the American life style for 50 years I am a little taken aback that a decision to wipe out years of history, was done with little regard for the respect of fans who have supported this media for so long. I feel there is a general disregard for the feelings of the fans as is apparent by having to read letter columns written by wives and husbands who have not a single thing to do with the creation of a book (e.g. *Superman, Action*).

I am all for change. I eagerly await the new versions of Superman, Wonder Woman, and, hopefully, Batman, but did it have to be at the expense of *everything* that had gone before. I feel that I am reading about characters that I have no sympathy with. The JLA that appeared in their anniversary issue made it quite clear this is not the same bunch of characters I had been asking to be returned to the book. These people are strangers to me. Am I alone in what I am feeling or are there others out there who feel DC's *Crisis* didn't turn out exactly as they had hoped for?

I wrote this letter to you because I realize that DC would never respond to my feelings without reminding me of what I am well aware of. These characters are fictional and I shouldn't take them so seriously. Well the same could be said of the staff at DC. If they didn't take their sales so seriously *Crisis* need never have happened. Having a convoluted universe seems to have made Marvel thrive more than it did in its early days when you didn't need an encyclopedia to read a simple comic. I think writers should learn how to tell stories in 6 pages again instead of needing 6 years and then leaving a book without tying up loose ends, right John and Marv?

★ *Well Philip, nobody can take away the stories that you loved. It seems to me that* Crisis *was created with the fans, especially "continuity freaks," in mind. Significantly, Superman of Earth-Two wasn't banished to limbo by an executive memo, but rather DC created a series that would allow the fans to participate in the changes they wanted to make. Whether they gained some creative elbow room at the cost of their heritage is an unanswered question at this point. But I'm going to stick around for the ride.* —*DS*

*KURT AUSTIN*
*Bellevue, NB*

## Complaints Dept.

I've been a loyal reader of your magazine since issue #2. I've always enjoyed the Hero Histories, the interviews, etc... but lately I've noticed a distinct drop in overall quality. Kim has mentioned various production problems in his editorials, so I've tried to be patient. However, the January 15th issue (#87) forced me to write in for the first time (yeah, I'll use that tired old trick to try to get my letter published). Not only did I receive #87 on the day after I received *both* #86 and #88, but it was over a month late, in fact. I had seen it on the racks at my local comic shop and wondered when the heck I'd get my copy in the mail. I realize that you can't control the post office, but come on guys, it is kind of frustrating to receive a magazine chock full of *old* news. This is not the first time that I've received books out of order, I had to wait weeks for the *X-Factor* preview issue. As a matter of fact, *X-Factor* itself had been on the stands for weeks before I got the "preview."

And that leads me to my second point of contention. The previews and histories have been pitifully brief and hollow lately. Only three pages each devoted to *Electric Warrior* and *Lords of the Ultra Realm*! If the creators aren't supplying you with much info, why do you waste space on such sketchy articles?

My third gripe concerns not a lack of something but an enormous excess: typographical errors. I didn't mind much when an occasional letter was left out of a word (such as "editr"); typos are an unfortunate part of writing and a few are bound to slip by the proofreader or editor. I didn't even get too upset when a whole paragraph was repeated in the R.A. Jones *Secret Wars II* review (check out the 1st and 2nd full paragraphs on page 49.) However the last straw, the final blow, the grand-daddy of boo-boos appeared in Brian Henry's letter on page 52. I hardly think that Mr. Henry meant to say that he had "found out that NOW all independent comics are about gun-toting, ominously named, Commie-hating, freelance mercenaries...!" To make matters worse, his previous sentence had praised you for "the consistently *high quality* of you publication." Please, please do something about the current sorry state of affairs. Your magazine has too much talent and potential to be dragged down by continued inferior products. I'd like to see R.A. Jones review a recent issue of *Amazing Heroes*! Though I often enjoy his reviews, I think it is incredibly damaging to you for him to criticize others' efforts while your own publication is so sloppy.

If this letter seems bitchy, good! I have a great respect for your work, but at the same time, I'm appalled at the apparent carelessness of the book lately. I proofread papers at the university I attend, so maybe I'm a bit more sensitive about typos than others. Kim mentioned in his editorial in #87 that he had chosen a new editor. Good! I only hope that she/he will be able to restore the book to its former high level of quality.

I recently renewed my subscription, so I hope I'll see a much better product appearing in the remainder of 1986. Again, please try to improve the Hero Histories and previews by presenting more in-depth info, more carefully reserched facts, and more interviews with creators. I fondly remember the *Doom Patrol*, *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*, and *Metal Men* articles of your first two years of publication. If it is necessary to reduce the publication to monthly to produce a better magazine, please do so. What do other readers think about the issues I've raised in this letter? Am I the only one concerned about what's been happening to my favorite fanzine? Am I concerned about nothing? C'mon folks, this magazine is for us, the comic fans. Tell the *Amazing Heroes* people what you think. I, for one, want to enjoy it as much as I once did. How about *you*?

★ *Fair enough. Kim has already talked about our subscription problems but to reiterate... Labeling for our subscribers is done on a computer in Connecticut. It crashed. It was out of our control but it's still our responsibility and we apologize. Around here, we proofread between typesetting and paste-up (makes sense, right?). With an out-of-house editor, proofreading had a tendency to fall between the cracks. That shouldn't be a problem any more and I hope you've already noticed an improvement. As for the Histories and Previews, I think the* Shadow *preview and the* Charlton Action Heroes *History in recent issues should have been more to your taste. Beginning two months from now, we'll be revamping AH with new features, expanded page count and a different design. So hang around, we're gonna make it worth your while.* —*DS*

*ROBERT KLEIN*
*Grafton, MA*

## Yesterday's Heroes

After I had a brief conversation with another long-time comics reader, I thought I should ask you a question that came to mind. We were talking about the fanzines we had read once upon a time, in those days of much smaller circulation and poorer production values.

In spite of their many shortcomings, both editorial and cosmetic, those fanzines had something that we rarely see in the present day product. What I'm talking about is the way you would periodically find an article on the Golden Age material that was scarce and expensive, so very few of us actually got to see it.

Like Fanstance. I think it would be great to have an article which would cover the life and times of some of the outstanding titles of our hobby. Like *Adventure Comics*—it was there at the beginning of comics history, flourished in the Golden Age, changed to accommodate the changing DC POV in the '50s, revived in the '60s, sputtered and experimented a bit in the '70s, before dying in 1983. It is sort of a microcosm of DC history, and it featured some great characters—Sandman, Starman, Superboy, the Legion in a long run, and later the controversial Spectre and Aquaman. Not to mention the host of second-stringers, many of whom are interesting in their own right: Johnny Quick, Shining Knight, Supergirl, Zatanna, Manhunter, Hourman. If I wanted to go on, we could get into some of the talents that *Adventure* displayed, or even the packaging experiments in size and shape. But you get the point, I'm sure.

Now, a similar discussion could be developed around, say, *Marvel Mystery*. It formed an important part of what is now Marvel and would probably be very interesting for Marvel fans.

But this is just an idea I thought I'd try to plug. The real issue for me is that we rarely get to see any information on the Golden Age. There is a two-fold disservice to today's comic fans from that. There is simply a lot of good stuff out there we don't really get exposed to, and for those of us who'd like to buy and read some of this material, we don't necessarily know which issues we'd be interested in.

I know that Ron Goulart did something on Golden Age stuff a few years ago, and I assume it was not a smashing success. Based on what I saw, he made a poor choice of subject matter by writing on second-tier, forgettable companies and characters that only die-hard fans or trivia buffs would be interested in.

The real point here is that there is a lot of material out there besides mutants or *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. Although they are interesting, there is a lot more to comic. What do you think?

By the way, please don't think that I'm an unhappy AH reader—quite the contrary. I really like your material, and find it well written (a real plus in my mind) as well as informative—clearly the best on the racks. But I just thought this could help open new areas for you, as well as the readers.

P.S. Just an aside: it would be wonderful to see a piece on the Charlton Heroes. Although they are interesting in their own right, now that DC is bringing them back, a lot of us would like to know more about them.

★ *Dreams can come true. It can happen to you. If you're hung at heart... I hope you bought our special* Crisis *issue with the* Charlton Hero History. *I couldn't agree with you more. One of my editorial aims at AH is to initiate today's fans in some serious comics-lore. You can't really understand the Thing if you don't know of Marvel's pre-FF monster books, just as you can't appreciate the Flash or Green Lantern if you're ignorant of DC's science fiction books of the '50s. Fans get all hot and bothered when a character's origin is changed but if they knew anything about Superman's history they'd realize that he has always changed to suit the times. DC's Golden Age reprints during the '70s was my first exposure to Jack Cole's Plastic Man, C.C. Beck's Captain Marvel and a whole other era of comics. I miss seeing that stuff and I'm more than willing to run articles on that period.* —*DS*

Illustration by DAVE NELSON; character © Marvel Comics Group

# small press watch

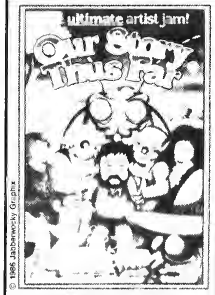
by Scott McCloud

Small press is a catch all term for comics with low enough print runs that any profit is negligible. Many are photocopied and all titles listed here are in black and white on white paper unless otherwise noted. Page count *includes covers*.

To order any of the items on this page, just send a short note with your name and address on it listing the comic(s) you want and enclose your payment. Cash is fine, and recommended on small orders, but make sure it doesn't show through the envelope. Also tape down any loose change. The address for each item appears at the beginning of its review. Please *do not* try to order from me or from *Amazing Heroes*.

I'll indicate postage on each item. Ppd = post-paid (price includes postage). Stamps unless otherwise noted, should be the regular 22¢ first class type.

Letters of comment are welcomed by just about everyone, and if you have comics of your own, trades can often be arranged. You're welcome to send them to me too. I can only review a fraction of what comes out, but I'll definitely read it and try to respond with a postcard at least. You can reach me at PO box 698, Tarrytown NY 10591-0698. (Comments about this column should be sent to *AH* as usual.) —SCOTT McCLOUD

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5½" x 8½"/28 pages.
full color covers, offset quality.

1986 Corrigan & Nicholson

5½" x 8½"/32 pages

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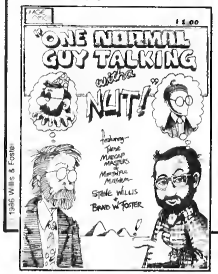


1986 Willis & Foster

**OUR STORY THUS FAR #1 and #2 by various artists.**
**$2.50 ppd. and $3.00 ppd., respectively from Jabberwocky Graphix, P.O. Box 168258, Irving, TX 75016. Mature readers**

**FANDOM TEAM-UP #1 by Tim Corrigan and Jeff Nicholson. $1.85 ppd. from Klutz Enterprises, P.O. Box 3884, Chico, CA 95927 or CAT Graphics, 45 Wilcox Street, Rochester, NY 14607.**

**ONE NORMAL GUY TALKING WITH A NUT by Steve Willis and Brad Foster. $1.00 and two stamps from Kage Comics c/o Clint Hollingsworth, 305 Ash #8, Pullman, WA 99163.**

It might seem a bit odd to talk about jamming in comics when so many titles are already group efforts of one kind or another. Many people even take it for granted that comics are just naturally a committee process. Not so in small press, where the best artists usually work solo, producing very personal works that would never come within ten feet of a fill-in artist or a "guest scripter". Still the temptation to team-up once in a while is hard to resist so a number of jam comics have been popping up all over recently. The ways these artists have collaborated, though, are as wild and varied as the artists themselves.

*Our Story Thus Far* is a slick little comic from Texas small press publisher Brad Foster which employs one of the simplest methods of jamming. In *Our Story*, each artist writes and draws a single panel of an ever-continuing story and hands it over to the next artist in line. Foster's only requirements were that "each artist had to continue the story directly from what has occurred on the page preceding theirs; that they leave some kind of open-ending for the next artist to take off from; and that the main character, Mark Simmons, had to appear on their page." Everything else was left entirely to the artist's discretion. It should come as no surprise that *Our Story* is a wildly uneven and thoroughly confusing comic. Of the 56 artists in these two volumes, only about half have made serious attempts to further the story, the rest opting for any number of laughable cop-outs, including that old stand-by, "it was only a dream." But what *Our Story* lacks in literary merit it more than makes up for with the sheer number and diversity of its contributors. Jim Ryan, Trina Robbins, Rick Geary, Vel...ntino, Steve Willis, Kerry Gammill, Matt Wagner, Phil Foglio, and even cat yronwode have all contributed pages, along with dozens of well- and lesser-known small pressers. Some pages are excellent, others are downright embarrassing, but, as with most jams, it's the very idea of the collaboration that counts, and the idea behind this one is pretty neat.

*Fandom Team-Up Featuring Mightyguy and Ultra Klutz* represents another kind of jam. In *Team-Up* Jeff Nicholson and Tim Corrigan combine talents and characters in a single story which is so seamless, I honestly couldn't begin to tell you who wrote or drew which pages. In spite of the two very different styles (or perhaps because of that difference) Nicholson and Corrigan work perfectly together and produce one of the most satisfying stories *either* has done.

*One Normal Guy Talking With a Nut* is the most interesting of the jams I've seen. *One Normal Guy* presents a kind of graphic conversation between Steve Willis and Brad Foster. Both artists appear "in person," using whatever props, backgrounds, and sight gags they want to help make their points. The two are jokingly antagonistic to each other, making for some funny exchanges, but their disagreements do underly some important philosophical differences and, when they aren't just clowning around, both artists make some worthwhile observations. I can't say it's an even match since Willis is really the more mature of the two, but Foster gets in some great licks, and certainly holds his own. This one is a noble experiment that I hope will continue with other artists in the future.

1986 Willis & Foster

An exchange from ONE NORMAL GUY TALKING WITH A NUT.




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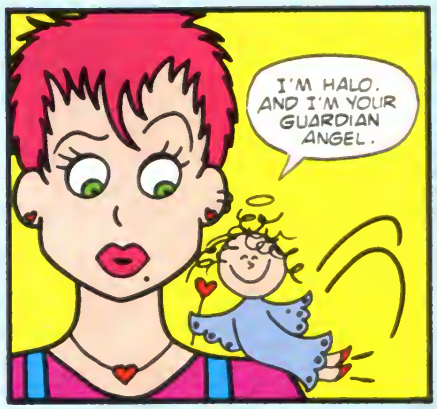


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